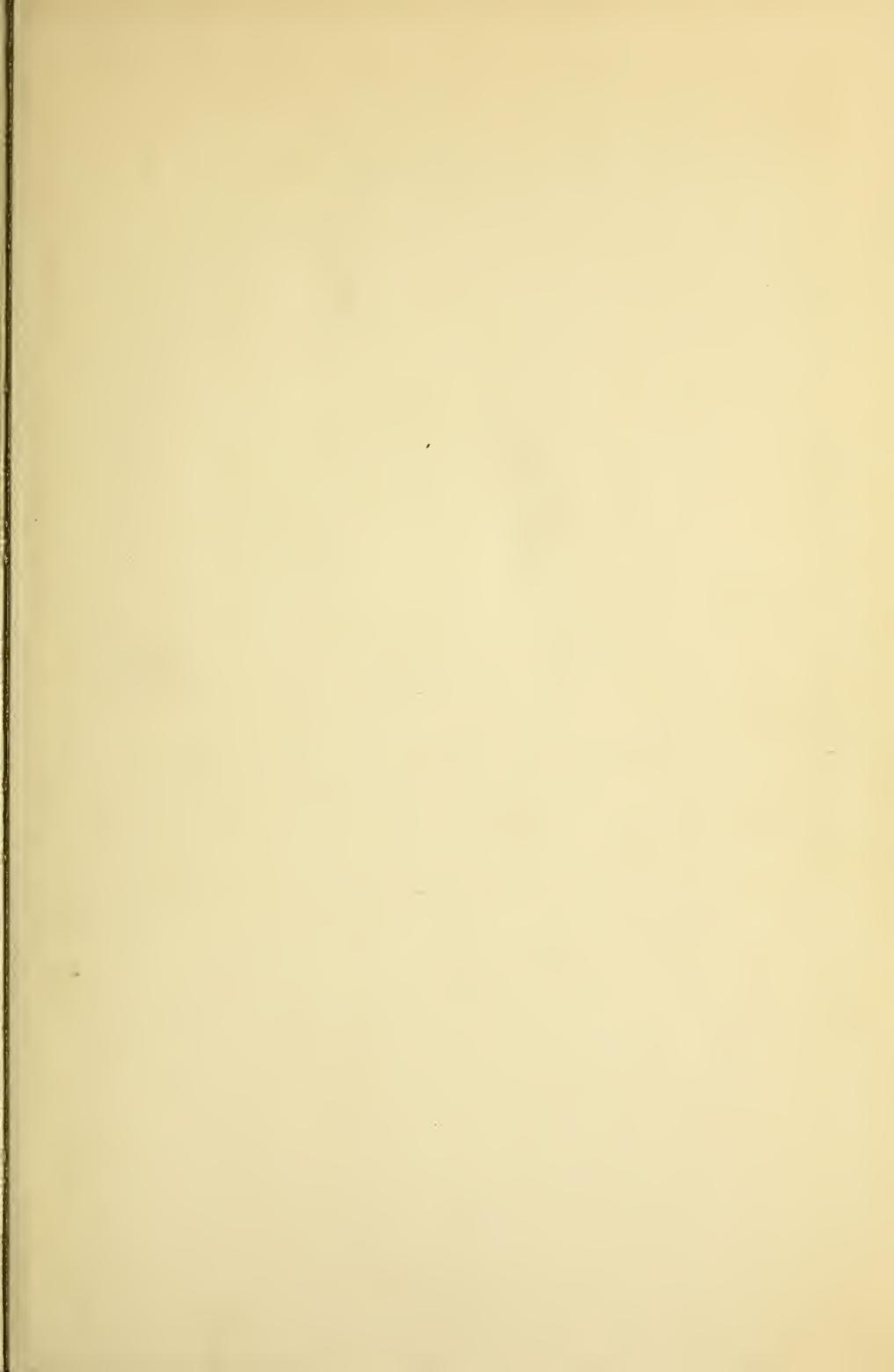


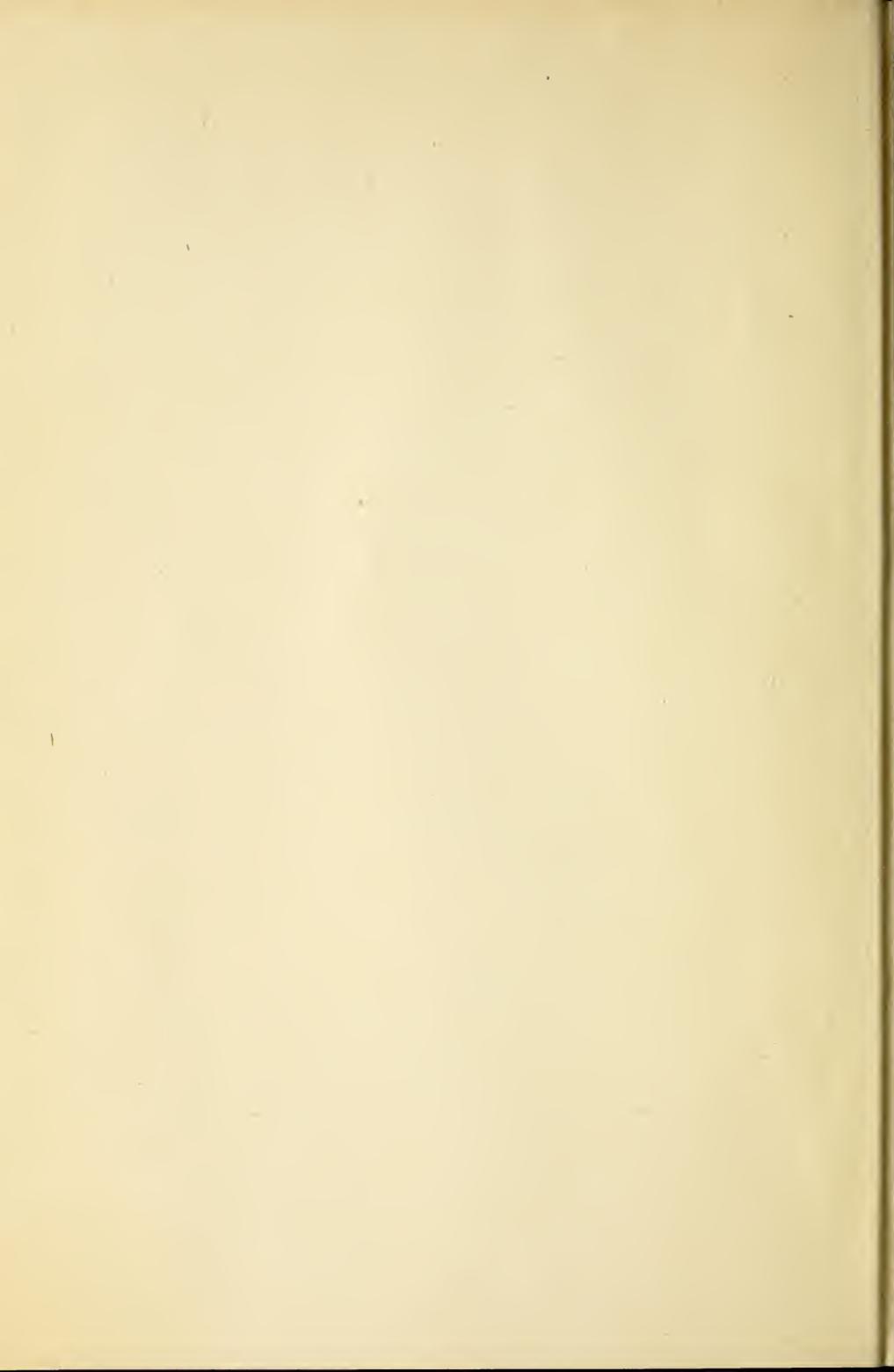


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**I REMEMBER MAMA**

*Also by John van Druten*

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YOUNG WOODLEY  
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THERE'S ALWAYS JULIET  
SOMEBODY KNOWS  
BEHOLD, WE LIVE  
THE DISTAFF SIDE  
FLOWERS OF THE FOREST  
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GERTIE MAUDE  
LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN  
OLD ACQUAINTANCE  
THE DAMASK CHEEK (*with Lloyd Morris*)  
THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE

*Novels*

YOUNG WOODLEY  
A WOMAN ON HER WAY  
AND THEN YOU WISH

*Autobiography*

THE WAY TO THE PRESENT

# I REMEMBER MAMA

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

BY

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

ADAPTED FROM KATHRYN FORBES' BOOK  
MAMA'S BANK ACCOUNT

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY, NEW YORK

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JOHN VAN DRUTEN

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TO MADY

*with love*

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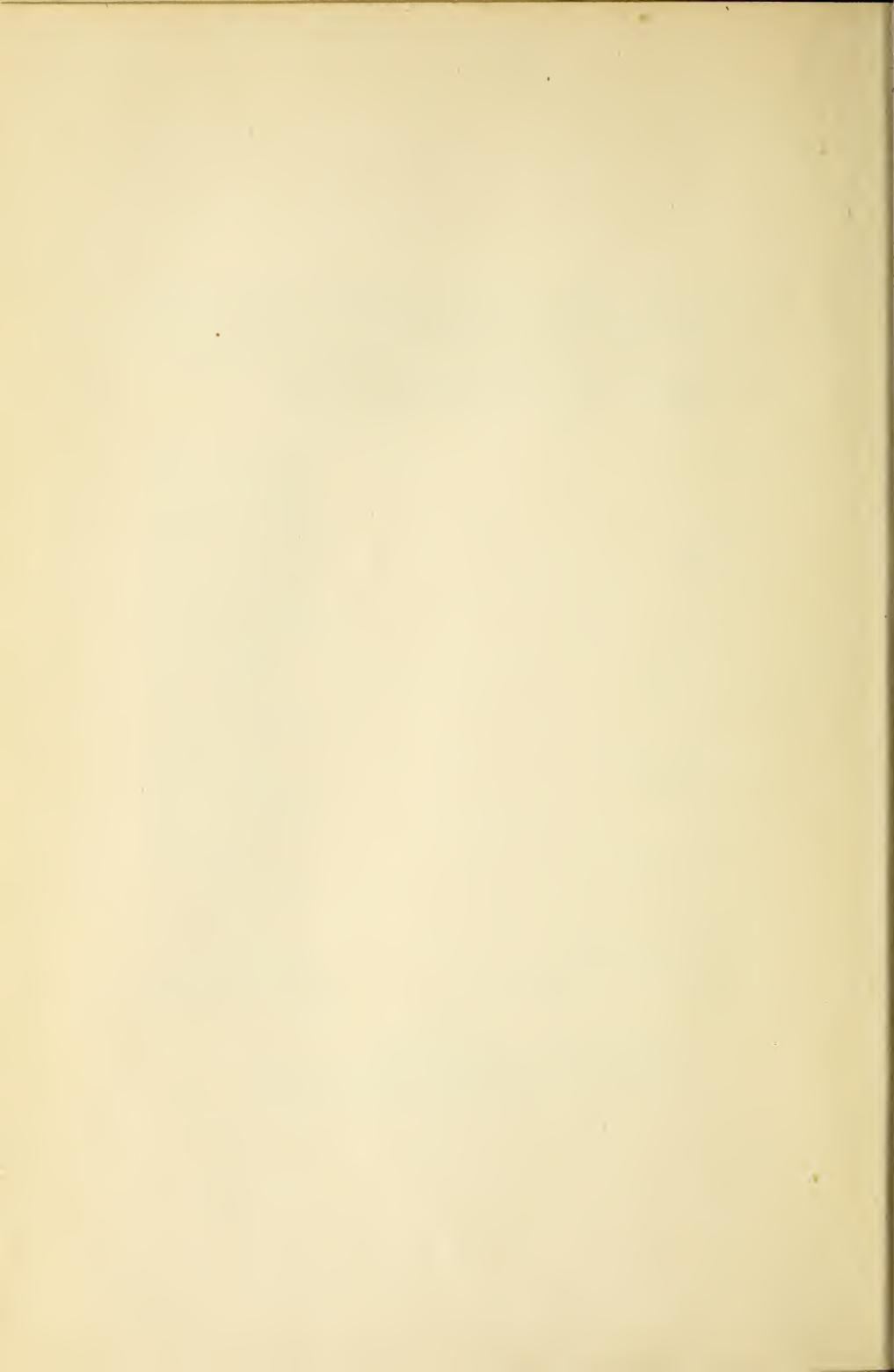
"I Remember Mama" was first produced by Messrs. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II at the Shubert Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut, on September 28, 1944, and subsequently at the Music Box Theatre, New York City, on October 19, 1944, with the following cast:

KATRIN	Joan Tetzel
MAMA	Mady Christians
PAPA	Richard Bishop
DAGMAR	Carolyn Hummel
CHRISTINE	Frances Heflin
MR. HYDE	Oswald Marshall
NELS	Marlon Brando
AUNT TRINA	Adrienne Gessner
AUNT SIGRID	Ellen Maher
AUNT JENNY	Ruth Gates
UNCLE CHRIS	Oscar Homolka
A WOMAN	Louise Lorimer
MR. THORKELSON	Bruno Wick
DR. JOHNSON	William Pringle
ARNE	Robert Antoine
A NURSE	Marie Gale
ANOTHER NURSE	Dorothy Elder
SODA CLERK	Frank Babcock
MADELINE	Cora Smith
DOROTHY SCHILLER	Ottlie Kruger
FLORENCE DANA MOORHEAD	Josephine Brown
BELL-BOY	Herbert Kenwith

Staged by Mr. van Druten

Settings and lighting by George Jenkins

Costumes designed by Lucinda Ballard

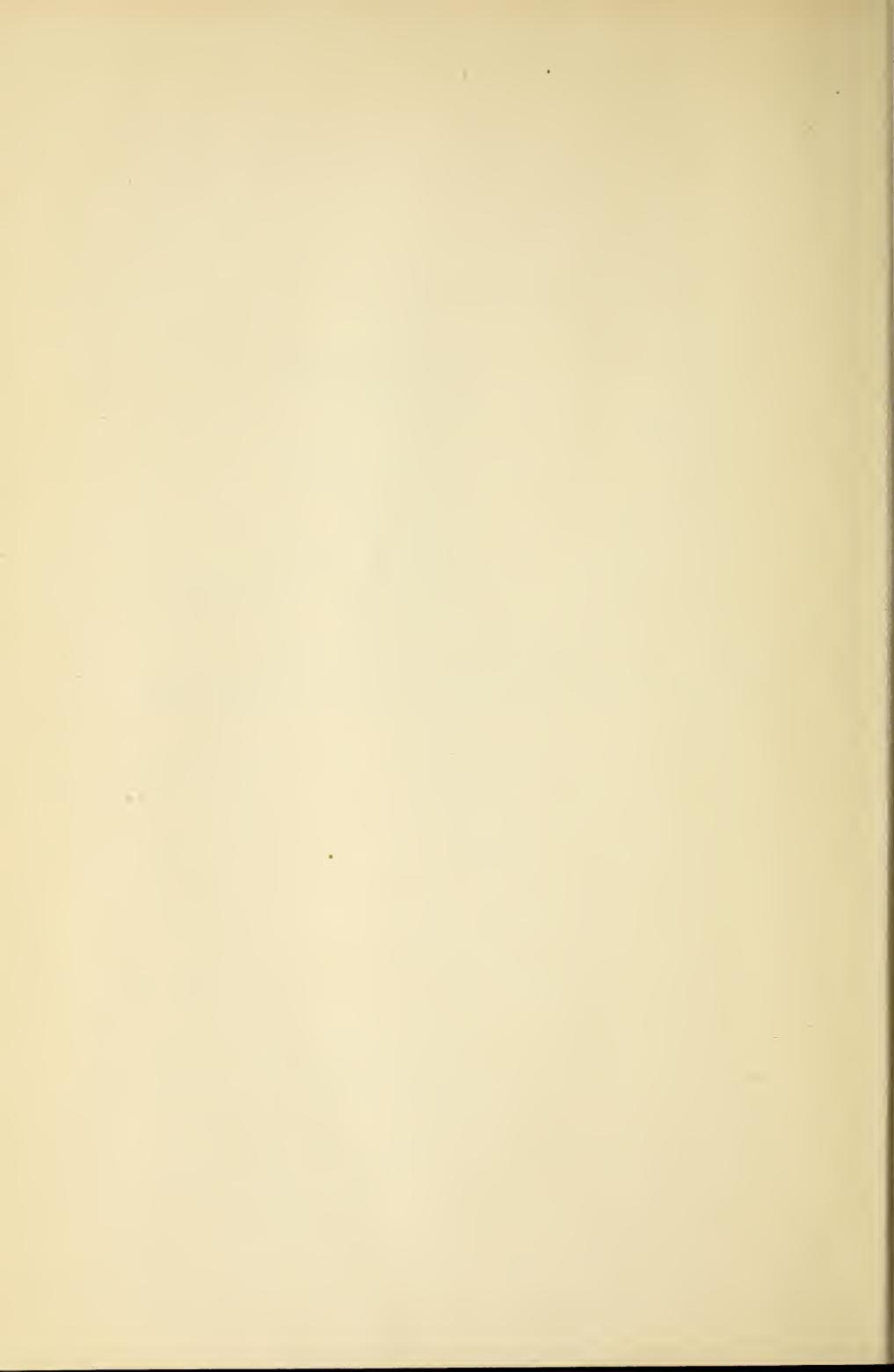


## CHARACTERS

KATRIN	A WOMAN
MAMA	MR. THORKELSON
PAPA	DR. JOHNSON
DAGMAR	ARNE
CHRISTINE	A NURSE
NELS	ANOTHER NURSE
MR. HYDE	SODA CLERK
AUNT TRINA	MADELINE
AUNT JENNY	DOROTHY SCHILLER
AUNT SIGRID	FLORENCE DANA MOORHEAD
UNCLE CHRIS	BELL-BOY

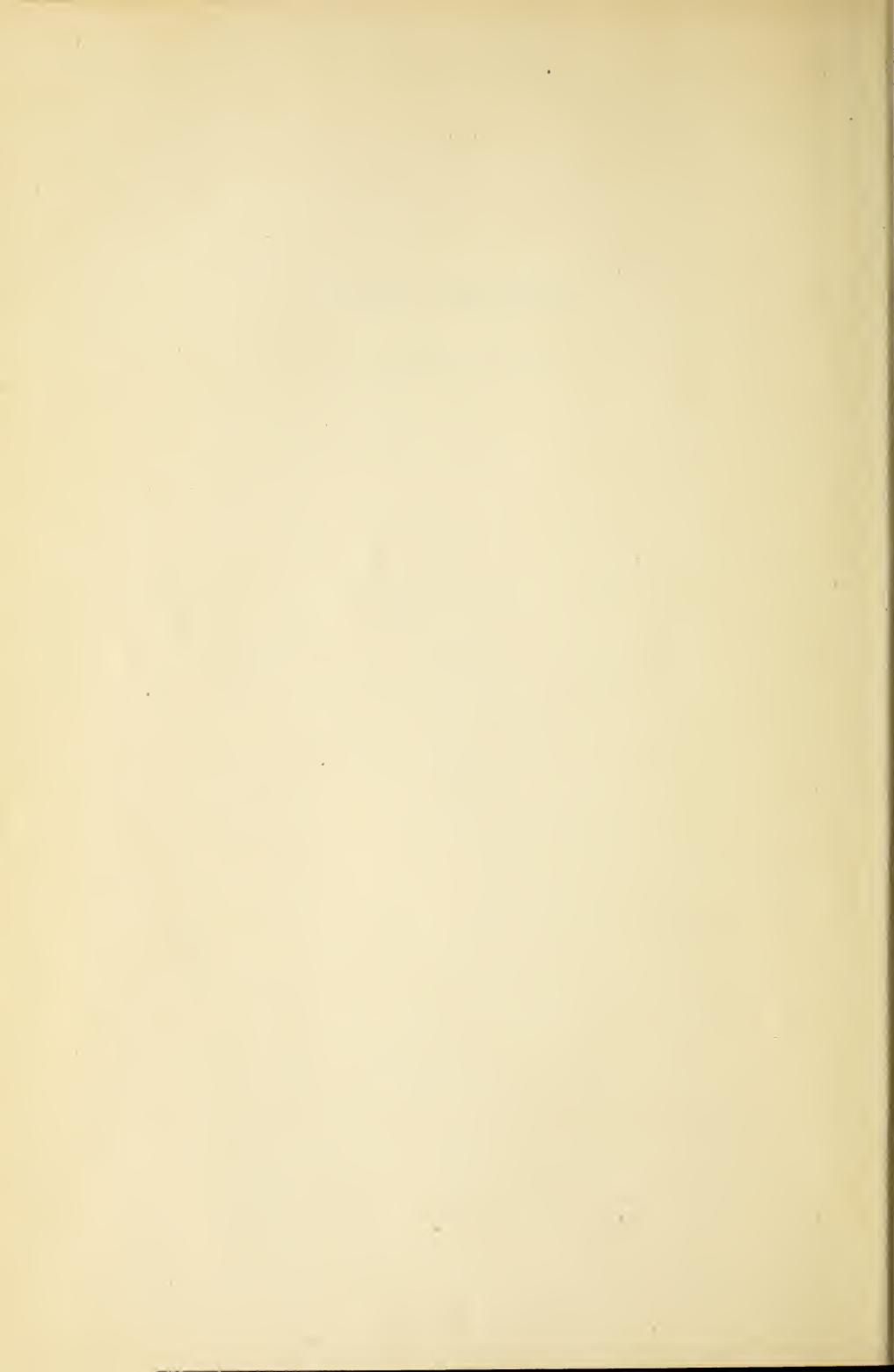
Scrub woman, nurses, doctors, and hotel guests.

The action passes in and around San Francisco some years ago.



I REMEMBER MAMA

*ACT ONE*



## ACT ONE

*(The stage directions in this script are a description of the method of presentation used in the production at The Music Box Theatre, New York City. It is possible that these could be altered or simplified in the case of other productions, if necessary.)*

*The period of the play is around 1910.*

*On either side of the stage, down front, are two small turntables, left and right, on which the shorter front scenes are played against very simplified backgrounds. As each scene finishes the lights dim and the table revolves out, leaving an unobstructed view of the main stage. The main stage is raised by two steps, above which traveler curtains open and close.*

*When the curtain rises, KATRIN, in a spotlight, is seated at a desk on the right turntable, facing the audience. She is writing and smoking a cigarette. KATRIN is somewhere in her early twenties. She should be played by an actress who is small in stature, and capable of looking sufficiently a child not to break the illusion in subsequent scenes. She is a blonde. Her hair, when we see her first, is in a modern "up" style, capable of being easily loosened to fall to shoulder length for the childhood scenes. She wears a very short dress, the skirt*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*of which is concealed for the prologue by the desk behind which she is seated.*

*KATRIN writes in silence for a few moments, then puts down her pen, takes up her manuscript, and begins to read aloud what she has written.*

KATRIN

*(Reading)*

“For as long as I could remember, the house on Steiner Street had been home. Papa and Mama had both been born in Norway, but they came to San Francisco because Mama’s sisters were here. All of us were born here. Nels, the oldest and the only boy—my sister Christine—and the littlest sister, Dagmar.”

*(She puts down her manuscript and looks out front)*

It’s funny, but when I look back, I always see Nels and Christine and myself looking almost as we do today. I guess that’s because the people you see all the time stay the same age in your head. Dagmar’s different. She was always the baby—so I see her as a baby. Even Mama—it’s funny, but I always see Mama as around forty. She couldn’t *always* have been forty.

*(She puts out her cigarette, picks up her manuscript and starts to read again)*

“Besides us, there was our boarder, Mr. Hyde. Mr. Hyde was an Englishman who had once been an actor, and Mama was very impressed by his flowery talk and courtly manners. He used to read aloud to us in the evenings. But first and foremost, I remember Mama.”

*(The light dims down, leaving KATRIN only faintly visible. Lights come up on the main stage, revealing the house on Steiner Street—a kitchen room. It*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*has a back flat, with a dresser C., holding china. On either side of the dresser is a door; the one to the R. leads to the pantry; the one to the L. to the rest of the house. The L. wall is a short one. It is the wall of the house, and contains a door up-stage leading into the street, being presumably the back door of the house, but the one most commonly used as the entry-door. Beyond it the street is visible, with a single lamp-post L., just outside the house. Behind the room rises the house itself with upper windows lighted, and behind it a painted backdrop of the San Francisco hills, houses, and telegraph posts.*

*The furniture of the kitchen is simple. A table C., with two chairs above it, armchairs at either end, and a low bench below it. Against the R. wall up-stage, a large stove; below it another armchair. The window is below the door in the L. wall and has a low Norwegian chest under it)*

### KATRIN'S VOICE

*(Continuing in the half-dark, as the scene is revealed)*

"I remember that every Saturday night Mama would sit down by the kitchen table and count out the money Papa had brought home in the little envelope."

*(By now the tableau is revealed in full, and the light on KATRIN dwindle further. The picture is as she described. MAMA—looking around forty—is in the armchair R. of the table, emptying the envelope of its silver dollars and smaller coins. PAPA—looking a little older than MAMA—stands above her.*

I REMEMBER MAMA

*His English throughout is better than hers, with less accent)*

MAMA

You call the children, Lars. Is good they should know about money.

*(PAPA goes to door back L., and calls)*

PAPA

Children! Nels—Christine—Katrín!

CHILDREN'S VOICES

*(Off, answering)*

Coming, Papa!

MAMA

You call loud for Katrín. She is in her study, maybe.

PAPA

She is where?

MAMA

Katrín make the old attic under the roof into a study.

PAPA

*(Amused)*

So?

*(Shouting)*

Katrín! Katrín!

KATRIN

*(Still at her desk, down front)*

Yes, Papa. I heard.

PAPA

*(Returning to the room)*

A study now, huh? What does Katrín study?

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

I think Katrin wants to be author.

PAPA

Author?

MAMA

Stories she will write. For the magazines. And books, too, maybe, one day.

PAPA

(*Taking out his pipe*)  
Is good pay to be author?

MAMA

I don't know. For magazines, I think maybe yes. For books, I think no.

PAPA

Then she become writer for magazines.

MAMA

Maybe. But I like she writes books. Like the ones Mr. Hyde reads us.

(DAGMAR enters from the pantry. *She is a plump child of about eight and carries an alley cat in her arms*)

Dagmar, you bring that cat in again?

DAGMAR

Sure, she's my Elizabeth—my beautiful Elizabeth!

(*She crosses to the chest under the window, and sits, nursing the cat*)

PAPA

Poor Elizabeth looks as if she had been in fight again.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

DAGMAR

Not poor Elizabeth. *Brave* Elizabeth. Elizabeth's a Viking cat. She fights for her honor!

PAPA

(*Exchanging an amused glance with MAMA*)  
And just what is a cat's honor, little one?

DAGMAR

The honor of being the bravest cat in San Francisco.

(*CHRISTINE comes in back L. She, like KATRIN, should be played by a small young actress, but not a child. Her hair is to her shoulders—her dress short—her age indeterminate. Actually, she is about 13 at this time. She is the cool, aloof, matter-of-fact one of the family*)

Aren't you, Elizabeth?

CHRISTINE

(*Sitting above the table*)  
That disgusting cat!

DAGMAR

She's not disgusting. She's beautiful. Beautiful as the dawn!

CHRISTINE

And when have *you* ever seen the dawn?

DAGMAR

I haven't seen it, but Mr. Hyde read to us about it.

(*MR. HYDE comes in from door back L. He is a slightly seedy, long-haired man in his fifties. Rather of the old-fashioned English "laddie" actor type. He wears a very shabby long overcoat, with a de-*

I REMEMBER MAMA

*plorable fur collar, and carries his hat. His accent is English)*

Didn't you, Mr. Hyde? Didn't you read to us about the dawn?

MR. HYDE

I did, my child of joy. The dawn, the rosy-finger-tipped Aurora. . . .

DAGMAR

When can I get to *see* the dawn, Mama?

MAMA

Any morning you get up early.

DAGMAR

Is there a dawn every morning?

MAMA

Sure.

DAGMAR

*(Incredulous)*

It's all that beautiful, and it happens every *morning*? Why didn't anyone *tell* me?

MR. HYDE

My child, that is what the poets are for. To tell you of *all* the beautiful things that are happening every day, and that no one sees until they tell them.

*(He starts for the door L.)*

MAMA

You go out, Mr. Hyde?

MR. HYDE

For a few moments only, dear Madam. To buy myself a modicum of that tawny weed, tobacco, that I lust after,

## I REMEMBER MAMA

as Ben Jonson says. I shall be back in time for our nightly reading.

*(He goes out and disappears down the street, into the wings, off L.)*

MAMA

*(Who has gone to the door back L., calls with a good deal of sharpness and firmness)*

Nels! Katrin! You do not hear Papa call you?

NELS

*(From off, upstairs)*

Coming, Mama!

KATRIN

*(At her desk)*

Yes, Mama. I'm coming.

*(She rises. In her few moments in the dark, she has loosened her hair to her shoulders, and we see that her skirt is short as she walks from her desk, and up the steps into the set. As soon as she has left it, the turntable revolves out. Immediately after her, NELS comes in back L. He is a tall, strapping young fellow—old enough to look 18 or 19, or 15 or 16, according to his dress, or demeanor. Now, he is about 15)*

PAPA

So now all are here.

MAMA

Come, then.

*(CHRISTINE, NELS and KATRIN gather around the table. DAGMAR remains crooning to ELIZABETH)*

*(Sorting coins)*

First, for the landlord.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*(She makes a pile of silver dollars. It gets pushed down the table from one member of the family to the next, each speaking as he passes it. PAPA comes last)*

NELS

*(Passing it on)*

For the landlord.

KATRIN

*(Doing likewise)*

For the landlord.

CHRISTINE

*(Passing it to PAPA)*

The landlord.

PAPA

For the landlord.

*(He dumps the pile at his end of the table, writing on a piece of paper, which he wraps around the pile)*

MAMA

*(Who has been sorting)*

For the grocer.

*(The business is repeated. During this repeat, Dagmar's crooning to the cat becomes audible, contrapuntally to the repetitions of "For the grocer")*

DAGMAR

*(In a crescendo)*

In all the United States no cat was as brave as Elizabeth.

*(Fortissimo)*

In all the world no cat was as brave as Elizabeth!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Gently)*

Hush, Dagmar. Quietly. You put Elizabeth back into the pantry.

DAGMAR

*(In a loud, stage whisper, as she crosses to pantry)*

In Heaven or HELL no cat was as brave as Elizabeth!

*(She goes out with the cat)*

MAMA

For Katrin's shoes to be half-soled.

*(She passes a half dollar)*

NELS

Katrin's shoes.

KATRIN

*(Proudly)*

*My* shoes!

CHRISTINE

*(Contemptuously)*

Katrin's old shoes.

PAPA

Katrin's shoes.

CHRISTINE

Mama, Teacher says this week I'll need a new notebook.

MAMA

How much it will be?

CHRISTINE

A dime.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Giving her a dime)*

For the notebook. You don't lose it.

CHRISTINE

I won't lose it.

*(She wraps it in her handkerchief)*

MAMA

You take care when you blow your nose.

CHRISTINE

I'll take care.

PAPA

Is all, Mama?

MAMA

Is all for this week. Is good. We do not have to go to the Bank.

*(She starts to gather up the few remaining coins.*

*KATRIN leaves the group, comes and sits on steps, front)*

NELS

Mama. . . .

*(She looks up, catching an urgency in his tone.*

*PAPA suspends smoking for a moment)*

Mama, I'll be graduating from grammar school next month. Could I . . . could I go on to High, do you think?

MAMA

*(Pleased)*

You want to go to High School?

NELS

I'd like to . . . if you think I could.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Is good.

(PAPA nods approvingly)

NELS

(Awkwardly)

It . . . it'll cost a little money. I've got it all written down.

(Producing a piece of paper from his pocket)

Carfare, clothes, notebooks, things I'll really need. I figured it out with Cy Nichols. He went to High last year.

(MAMA and PAPA come closer together, to look at the paper he puts before them)

MAMA

Get the Little Bank, Christine.

(CHRISTINE gets a small box from the dresser)

KATRIN

(From the steps—herself again, in the present—looking out front)

The Little Bank! That was the most important thing in the whole house. It was a box we used to keep for emergencies—like the time when Dagmar had croup and Papa had to go and get medicine to put in the steam kettle. I can smell that medicine now! The things that came out of the Little Bank! Mama was always going to buy herself a warm coat out of it, when there was enough, only there never was.

(Meanwhile, MAMA has been counting the contents)

NELS

(Anxiously)

Is there enough, Mama?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Shaking her head)*

Is not much in the Little Bank right now. We give to the dentist, you remember? And for your roller-skates?

NELS

*(His face falling)*

I know. And there's your warm coat you've been saving for.

MAMA

The coat I can get another time. But even so . . .

*(She shakes her head)*

CHRISTINE

You mean Nels can't go to High?

MAMA

Is not enough here. We do not want to have to go to the Bank, do we?

NELS

No, Mama, no. I'll work in Dillon's grocery after school.

*(MAMA writes a figure on the paper and starts to count on her fingers. PAPA looks over, and does the sum in his head)*

PAPA

Is not enough.

MAMA

*(Finishing on her fingers against her collarbone)*

No, is not enough.

PAPA

*(Taking his pipe out of his mouth and looking at it a long time)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

I give up tobacco.

(MAMA looks at him, almost speaks, then just touches his sleeve, writes another figure and starts on her fingers again)

CHRISTINE

I'll mind the Maxwell children Friday nights. Katrin can help me.

(MAMA writes another figure. PAPA looks over-calculates again, nods with satisfaction)

MAMA

(Triumphantly)

Is good! Is enough!

NELS

Gee!

MAMA

We do not have to go to the Bank.

(DAGMAR returns, without the cat)

DAGMAR

(Hearing the last line)

Where is the Bank?

CHRISTINE

Downtown.

DAGMAR

What's it look like?

CHRISTINE

Just a building.

DAGMAR

Like a prison?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

(*Sharply*)

No, nothing like a prison.

DAGMAR

Well, then, why does Mama always say "We don't want to go to the Bank"?

CHRISTINE

Because . . . well, because no one ever wants to go to the Bank.

DAGMAR

Why not?

CHRISTINE

Because if we went to the Bank all the time, there'd be no money left there. And then if we couldn't pay our rent, they'd turn us out like Mrs. Jensen down the street.

DAGMAR

You mean, it's like saving some of your candy for tomorrow?

MAMA

Yes, my Dagmar. Is exactly like saving your candy.

DAGMAR

But if . . . if all the other people go to the Bank, then there won't be any money left for us, either.

NELS

(*Kindly*)

It isn't like that, Dagmar. Everyone can only get so much.

DAGMAR

How much?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

However much you've got there . . . put away. You see, it's *our* money that we put there, to keep safe.

DAGMAR

When did we put it there?

NELS

I . . . I don't know when. A long time back, I guess. Wasn't it, Mama?

MAMA

Is enough about the Bank.

DAGMAR

How much money have we got in the Bank?

NELS

I don't know. How much, Mama?

MAMA

Enough.

*(During the last speeches AUNT TRINA appears from the wings down front L. She is a timid, mouselike little woman of about 40, with some prettiness about her. She wears her hat and coat, and a pathetic feather boa. She comes up the street and knocks on the house door)*

MAMA

*(Hearing the knock)*

Was the door?

CHRISTINE

*(Quickly)*

If it's the Aunts, I'm going to my boodwar.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

(*Rising, entering the scene*)  
And I'm going to my study.

MAMA

(*Stopping them*)  
You cannot run away. We must be polite to the Aunts.

(*PAPA has opened the door*)  
Why, is Trina!

PAPA

Trina, and all by herself!

MAMA

Say good evening to Aunt Trina, children.

CHILDREN

(*Together*)  
Good evening, Aunt Trina.

TRINA

Good evening, children. How well they all look.

MAMA

You have a feather boa. Is new.  
(*Inspecting it*)  
Beautiful.

TRINA

(*Simpering a little*)  
It was a present.

MAMA

(*Smiling*)  
A present! Look, Lars. Trina has a present.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

PAPA

(*Feeling it*)

Is fine.

(*He puts Trina's hat, coat and boa on the chest under the window*)

MAMA

Jenny and Sigrid don't come with you, Trina?

TRINA

(*Embarrassed*)

No, I . . . I didn't tell them I was coming. I want to talk to you, Marta.

MAMA

(*Smiling*)

So? Sit then, and we talk.

TRINA

(*Nervously agitated*)

Could we talk alone?

MAMA

Alone?

TRINA

If you wouldn't mind.

MAMA

(*Going to the stove*)

Children, you leave us alone a little. I call you. Dagmar, you go with Katrin.

KATRIN

(*Protesting*)

Oh, but, Mama . . .

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Firmly)*

Katrin, you take Dagmar!

KATRIN

Yes, Mama.

*(Pushing DAGMAR, resentfully)*

Come on.

*(The CHILDREN go out back L.)*

MAMA

Now—what is it, Trina?

TRINA

*(Looking down, embarrassed)*

Marta . . .

MAMA

*(Helpfully)*

Yes?

TRINA

Oh, no, I can't say it.

MAMA

*(Anxiously)*

Trina, what is it?

TRINA

It's . . . something very personal.

MAMA

You want Lars should go outside?

TRINA

Would you mind, Lars? Just for a minute?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

PAPA

*(Good-humoredly)*

No, I go. I know what women's secrets are.

*(Teasing)*

As your Uncle Chris say—"Vomen! Pff!"

MAMA

You have your pipe, Lars? Is fine night.

*(PAPA takes out his pipe—then lays it down)*

What is it?

PAPA

I forget. I give up tobacco.

MAMA

Is still some tobacco in your pouch?

*(PAPA nods)*

Then you do not give up tobacco till you have finish. You give up *more* tobacco—not the tobacco you already have.

PAPA

Is not right, Marta.

*(He pats her, takes his pipe, and goes out L., standing outside the house, under the lamp-post, and looking up at the stars, smoking)*

MAMA

So, Trina. Now. What is it?

TRINA

Marta. . . . I want to get married.

MAMA

You mean . . . you want to get married, or there is someone you want to marry?

I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

There's someone I want to marry.

MAMA

Does *he* want to marry *you*?

TRINA

He says he does.

MAMA

(*Delighted*)  
Trina! Is wonderful!

TRINA

(*Crying a little*)  
I think it is.

MAMA

Who is?

TRINA

Mr. Thorkelson.

MAMA

From the Funeral Parlor?

(TRINA *nods*. MAMA *nods*, speculatively, but with less enthusiasm)

TRINA

I know he isn't very handsome or . . . or tall. I know it isn't what most people would think a very nice profession, but . . .

MAMA

You love him, Trina?

(TRINA *nods ecstatically*)

I REMEMBER MAMA

Then is good.

*(She pats Trina's hand)*

TRINA

Marta, will you . . . will you help me tell the others?

MAMA

Oh . . . Jenny and Sigrid . . . they do not know?

TRINA

No. I was afraid they'd laugh at me. But if *you* tell them . . .

MAMA

Jenny will not like you tell me first.

TRINA

*(Desperately)*

I can't help that. You've got to tell them not to laugh at me. If they laugh at me, I'll . . . I'll kill myself.

MAMA

*(With decision)*

Jenny and Sigrid will not laugh. I promise you, Trina.

TRINA

Oh, thank you, Marta. And . . . Uncle Chris?

MAMA

*(With some seriousness)*

Ah!

TRINA

Will you talk to him?

MAMA

It is Mr. Thorkelson who must talk to Uncle Chris. Always it is the husband who must talk to the head of the family.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

Yes. I know, but . . . well, Uncle Chris is so very frightening. He's so big and black, and he shouts so. And Mr. Thorkelson is . . . well, kind of timid, really.

MAMA

*(Gently)*

But, Trina, if he is to be your husband, he must learn not to be timid. You do not want husband should be timid. *You* are timid. Is not good when *both* are timid.

*(Then firmly)*

No! Jenny and Sigrid I speak to, but Mr. Thorkelson must go to Uncle Chris.

PAPA

*(Re-enters the house)*

Marta, Trina, I do not want to interrupt your talk, but Jenny and Sigrid are coming.

TRINA

*(Alarmed)*

Oh, dear!

PAPA

I see them get off the cable-car. They come up the hill.

TRINA

*(In a flurry)*

I'd better go to your room for a minute.

*(She starts for the door, turns back, gets her things from the chest, and runs out, carrying them, back L. Meanwhile, MAMA has been whispering the news to PAPA)*

MAMA

The coffee is ready—I get more cups.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*(During the above, AUNTS JENNY and SIGRID have entered from the wings L., front. JENNY is a domineering woman in her fifties; SIGRID, whining and complaining)*

SIGRID

*(In the street)*

Wait, Jenny, I must get my breath. This hill kills me every time I climb it.

JENNY

You climbed bigger hills than that in the old country.

SIGRID

I was a girl in the old country.

*(They march to the door and knock—SIGRID following JENNY)*

MAMA

*(Opening the door to them)*

Jenny. Sigrid. Is surprise.

*(To SIGRID)*

Where's Ole?

SIGRID

Working. He's always working. I never see anything of him at all.

MAMA

*(Crossing to the stove for coffee-pot)*

Is good to work.

SIGRID

It's good to see your husband once in a while, too.

JENNY

*(No nonsense about her)*

Has Trina been here?

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA  
Trina?

JENNY  
She's gone somewhere. And she doesn't know anyone  
but *you*. . . .

MAMA  
That is what *you* think.

JENNY  
What do you mean by that?

MAMA  
Give Lars your coat. I give you some coffee. Then we  
talk about Trina.

SIGRID  
(*As PAPA helps with coats*)  
She *has* been here?

MAMA  
Yes, she has been here.  
(*Pouring coffee and passing cups*)

JENNY  
What did Trina want?

MAMA  
She want to talk to me.

JENNY  
What about?

MAMA  
Marriage.

SIGRID  
What?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Pouring calmly)*

Marriage.

*(Passing Sigrid's cup)*

Trina wants to get married.

JENNY

That's no news. Of course she wants to get married.  
Every old maid wants to get married.

MAMA

There is someone who wants to marry Trina.

JENNY

Who'd want to marry Trina?

MAMA

Mr. Thorkelson.

SIGRID

Peter Thorkelson? Little Peter?

*(She gestures a midget)*

MAMA

He is not so little.

SIGRID

He's hardly bigger than my Arne—and Arne is not ten yet.

MAMA

So he is hardly bigger than your Arne. Does every husband have to be big man?

JENNY

Trina's making it up. That happens with old maids, when they get to Trina's age.

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Firmly)*

No, Jenny—it is true. Mr. Thorkelson wants to marry Trina.

JENNY

*(Changing her tactics slightly)*

Mr. Thorkelson. She'd be the laughing stock.

*(She laughs)*

MAMA

*(Moving to her)*

Jenny, Trina is here. She will come in in a minute. This is serious for her. You will not laugh at her.

JENNY

I shall do what I please.

MAMA

No, Jenny, you will not.

JENNY

And why won't I?

MAMA

Because I will not let you.

JENNY

And how will you stop me?

MAMA

If you laugh at Trina, I will tell her of the time before your wedding when your husband try to run away.

SIGRID

What is that?

JENNY

Who told you that?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

I know.

SIGRID

*(Intrigued)*

Erik . . . tried to run away?

JENNY

It's not true.

MAMA

Then you do not mind if I tell Trina.

JENNY

Uncle Chris told you.

SIGRID

*(Tenaciously)*

Tried to run away?

MAMA

It does not matter, Sigrid. Jenny will not laugh at Trina now. Nor will you! For if *you* laugh at her, I will tell of your wedding night with Ole, when you cry all the time, and he bring you home to Mother.

PAPA

*(With sudden enjoyment)*

This I do *not* know!

MAMA

*(Reprovingly)*

Is no need you should know. I do not tell these stories for spite—only so they do not laugh at Trina. Call her, Lars. You like more coffee, Jenny? Sigrid?

*(PAPA goes to the door back L., calls, "Trina."*

*MAMA pours coffee for JENNY. MR. HYDE re-*

I REMEMBER MAMA

*appears down front L., and lets himself into the house)*

MR. HYDE

*(Seeing company)*

Oh, I beg your pardon. I was not aware . . .

MAMA

Mr. Hyde, these are my sisters.

MR. HYDE

Enchanted, ladies. Madame. Madame. The Three Graces.

*(He bows. SIGRID giggles coyly. He goes to the door back L.)*

You will excuse me?

MAMA

Sure, Mr. Hyde.

MR. HYDE

I shall be in my room.

*(He goes out)*

JENNY

So *that's* your famous boarder. Has he paid you his rent yet? Three months he's been here, hasn't he?

MAMA

Is hard to ask. Surely he will pay soon.

JENNY

*(With a snort)*

Surely he won't! If I ran my boarding house the way you run this place . . .

PAPA

Maybe your boarders wouldn't always leave you.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

If Marta thinks she's going to get the warm coat she's always talking about out of *that* one . . .

MAMA

Jenny, Mr. Hyde is a gentleman. He reads to us aloud. Wonderful books . . . Longfellow, and Charles Dickens, and Fenimore Kipling.

(TRINA steals back)

MAMA

(*Seeing her hesitant in the doorway*)

Come in, Trina. The coffee is getting cold.

(*She pours a cup. There is a silence*)

I tell them.

JENNY

Why did you come to Marta first?

PAPA

She thought Marta would understand.

JENNY

Aren't Sigrid and I married women, too?

PAPA

You have been married longer than Marta. She think maybe you forget.

JENNY

What sort of a living does Mr. Thorkelson make?

TRINA

I . . . I haven't asked.

SIGRID

Can he keep you?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

I don't think he would have asked me to marry him if he couldn't.

JENNY

Maybe he thinks you are going to keep *him*.

MAMA

(*Warningly*)

Jenny!

SIGRID

Maybe he thinks Trina will have a dowry like the girls at home.

TRINA

Well, why shouldn't I? You all had dowries. . . .

JENNY

We were married in Norway. And our parents were alive. Where would your dowry come from, I'd like to know?

TRINA

Uncle Chris. He's head of the family.

JENNY

And who will ask him?

TRINA

He won't need asking. When Mr. Thorkelson goes to see him . . .

JENNY

Uncle Chris will eat him!

SIGRID

(*Giggling maliciously*)

Little Peter and Uncle Chris!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(With meaning)*

Maybe Uncle Chris will tell him some family stories. He knows many, does Uncle Chris.

*(The AUNTS put down their cups, discomfited)*

JENNY

*(To change the subject)*

Where are the children? Aren't we going to see them before we go?

PAPA

Of course, I'll call them.

*(He goes to the door and does so, shouting)*

Children! Your Aunts are leaving!

CHILDREN'S VOICES

*(Eagerly)*

Coming, Papa!

JENNY

You come with us, Trina?

MAMA

I think maybe Trina like to stay here and listen to Mr. Hyde read to us. You like, Trina?

TRINA

Well, if I wouldn't be in the way. I asked Mr. Thorkelson to call for me here. He'll see me home. I'll help you with the coffee things.

*(She takes the tray of coffee cups and goes into the pantry)*

*(KATRIN returns, back L. She carries her diary, DAGMAR follows her, and behind them, CHRISTINE)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN and DAGMAR

(*Curtseying*)

Good evening, Aunt Sigrid. Good evening, Aunt Jenny.

(*CHRISTINE sketches a perfunctory curtsey without speaking*)

JENNY

Where have *you* all been hiding yourselves?

DAGMAR

(*Going into the pantry*)

We've been in Christine's boodwar.

JENNY

Her *what*?

MAMA

Christine makes the little closet into a boudoir. I give her those bead portieres, Jenny, that you lend us when we come from the old country.

SIGRID

And what does she do there?

CHRISTINE

(*Impertinently*)

What people usually do in boudoirs.

MAMA

Christine, that is rude. It is her little place to herself.

(*NELS enters, back L.*)

NELS

Hello, Aunt Sigrid. Hello, Aunt Jenny.

SIGRID

(*Shaking hands*)

Good evening, Nels. My, how tall he is getting!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Proudly)*

Yes, is almost as tall as his Papa.

SIGRID

He looks to me as if he was outgrowing his strength.  
Dagmar was looking pale, too.

*(DAGMAR returns now, carrying the cat again)*

SIGRID

*(Jumping)*

Goodness, what a horrid-looking cat.

DAGMAR

She's not. She's beautiful.

PAPA

Is her new friend. She goes with Dagmar everywhere.

CHRISTINE

She does. First thing you know, she'll have the cat sleeping with her.

DAGMAR

*(Eagerly)*

Oh, Mama, can I? Can I, Mama?

JENNY

Certainly not. Don't you know a cat draws breath from a sleeping child? You wouldn't want to wake up some morning *smothered*, would you?

DAGMAR

I wouldn't care. Elizabeth can have *all* my breath!

*(She blows into the cat's face)*

There!

I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

(*Putting on gloves*)

Elizabeth—what a very silly name for a cat.

NELS

It's a very silly name for *that* cat. It's a Tom.

MAMA

Nels, how you know?

NELS

I looked!

DAGMAR

How can you tell?

NELS

You can.

DAGMAR

But how?

MAMA

(*Quickly warning*)

Nels, you do not say how!

NELS

(*To DAGMAR*)

So you'd better think up another name for him.

DAGMAR

I won't. He's Elizabeth. And he's going to *stay* Elizabeth.

PAPA

We could call him *Uncle* Elizabeth!

DAGMAR

(*Laughing delightedly*)

Uncle Elizabeth! Do you hear, Elizabeth? You're called  
Uncle Elizabeth now!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

Such foolishness! Well, good-by, all. Marta. Lars.

*(Good-bys are exchanged all around, the CHILDREN curtseying formally)*

MAMA

Good-by, Jenny. Good-by, Sigrid. Nels, you go tell Mr. Hyde we are ready for the reading.

*(NELS goes off, back L. The AUNTS leave and walk down L. MAMA stands in the doorway, waving good-by)*

SIGRID

*(As they go)*

Well, I never thought we'd live to see Trina get married.

JENNY

She's not married yet. She's got Uncle Chris to deal with first.

*(They disappear into wings L.)*

MAMA

*(Returning to the room and calling into the pantry)*

Trina, they have gone. Dagmar, you put Elizabeth out for the night now.

DAGMAR

*(Correcting her)*

*Uncle Elizabeth!*

MAMA

*Uncle Elizabeth!!*

*(DAGMAR goes out into the pantry with the cat.)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA comes in as MR. HYDE and NELS return back  
L.)

Mr. Hyde, this is my sister Trina.

MR. HYDE

(Bowing)

Enchanted!

MAMA

(Seating herself R. of the table)

Mr. Hyde reads to us "The Tales From Two Cities." Is a beautiful story. But sad.

TRINA

(Brightly)

I like sad stories.

(She gets out her handkerchief)

(The whole family group themselves around the table, DAGMAR returning and seating herself on the floor below MAMA. MR. HYDE takes the armchair L. of table. KATRIN is on the steps R. front)

MR. HYDE

Tonight, I would like to finish it.

MAMA

Is good.

MR. HYDE

Are you ready?

CHILDREN

Yes, please, Mr. Hyde.

MR. HYDE

I will go on from where we left off.

(He starts to read)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

“In the black prison of the Conciergerie, the doomed of the day awaited their fate. They were in number as the weeks of the year. Fifty-two were to roll that afternoon on the life-tide of the City to the boundless, everlasting sea. . . .”

*(The lights dim down slowly, leaving spots on KATRIN and MR. HYDE only)*

KATRIN

I don't think I shall ever forget that night. It was almost midnight when he came to the end, and none of us had noticed.

MR. HYDE

*(Reading from the last page)*

“It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”

*(He closes the book)*

“The End.”

*(The R. turntable revolves in again. KATRIN rises from the step, and crosses to her desk on the turn-table)*

KATRIN

I wrote in my diary that night before I went to bed.

*(She reads aloud from it)*

“Tonight Mr. Hyde finished ‘The Tale of Two Cities.’ The closing chapters are indeed superb. How beautiful a thing is self-sacrifice. I wish there were someone I could die for.”

*(She sits looking out front.)*

Mr. Hyde read us all kinds of books. He thrilled us with “Treasure Island,” and terrified us with “The Hound of

## I REMEMBER MAMA

the Baskervilles." I can still remember the horror in his voice as he read. . . .

MR. HYDE

*(Still on the main stage in his spot, reading)*

"Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered: 'Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic *hound*!'"

*(He closes the book)*

We will continue tomorrow night. If you are interested.

KATRIN

*(Looking out front)*

If we were interested! You couldn't have kept us from it. It meant a lot to Mama, too, because Nels stopped going nights to the street corner to hang about with the neighborhood boys. The night they got into trouble for breaking into Mr. Dillon's store, Nels was home with us. And sometimes Mr. Hyde read us poetry. "The Lady of the Lake" . . . and the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

MR. HYDE

*(Reading)*

"About, about, in reel and rout  
The death-fires danced at night.  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green and blue and white."

*(His spot goes out, and the traveler curtains close  
on the kitchen scene)*

KATRIN

There were many nights I couldn't sleep for the way he had set my imagination dancing.

*(Reading from her diary again)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

"What a wonderful thing is literature, transporting us to realms unknown."

*(To herself)*

And all the time my school teacher kept telling me that I ought to write about things I knew. I did write a piece for her once about Uncle Chris, and she said it wasn't nice to write like that about a member of one's own family. Papa called Mama's Uncle Chris a black Norwegian, because of his dark hair and fierce mustache, but there were others in the family who claimed that he was black in a different way. The Aunts, for example.

*(Spot goes up on L. front turntable, representing Jenny's kitchen. JENNY and TRINA are discovered. JENNY is rolling pastry. TRINA is crocheting)*

JENNY

Black! I'll say he's black. Black in his heart. Cursing and swearing. . . .

TRINA

Marta says that's only because it hurts him to walk.

JENNY

Rubbish. I know all about his limp and the accident back in the old country—but has anyone ever heard him complain? Marta's always making excuses for him.

TRINA

I know . . . but he *is* good to the children. All those oranges he's always sending them. . . .

JENNY

Oranges! What good is oranges? Turn 'em yellow. They're the only things he's ever been known to give away, anyway. He's got other uses for his money.

I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

What you mean?

JENNY

Bottles! And that woman he lives with!

TRINA

He *says* she's his housekeeper.

JENNY

Well, he couldn't very well come right out and call her what she is, could he? Though *I* will one of these days. And to his face, too.

(SIGRID comes through the curtains C. She crosses to JENNY and TRINA)

SIGRID

Jenny. Trina. What do you think? What do you think Uncle Chris has done now?

TRINA

What?

JENNY

Tell us.

SIGRID

You know my little Arne's knee—that fall he had two months ago? The man at the drugstore said it was only a bruise, but today it was hurting him again, so I left him home when I went to do the marketing. I asked Mrs. Schultz next door to keep an eye on him, and who should turn up, not ten minutes after I'd gone, but Uncle Chris. And what do you think?

JENNY

Well, tell us, if you're going to. Don't keep *asking* us.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

SIGRID

He took one look at Arne's knee, bundled him into that rattletrap old automobile of his, and rushed him straight off to the hospital. I've just come from there . . . and what do you think? They've operated! They've got him in Plaster of Paris!

JENNY

Without consulting you?

SIGRID

It seems the doctor is a friend of his . . . that's why he did it. No, this time he's gone too far. To put a child of Arne's age through all that pain! They wouldn't even let me *see* Arne. I'm going to tell Uncle Chris exactly what I think of him. . . .

JENNY

That's right.

SIGRID

I'm going to tell him right now.

*(Weakening a little)*

Come with me, Jenny.

JENNY

Well, I . . . No, I can't leave my *baking*. *Knitting*

SIGRID

You must, Jenny. We must stand together. You come, too, Trina, and ask about your dowry. *Make* him give it to you.

TRINA

Oh, but . . . Marta said Mr. Thorkelson should do that. . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

Well, then, go and get Mr. Thorkelson. Go down to the mortuary and get him now. Sigrid's quite right. We girls have got to stand together!

*(Blackout. Turntable revolves out)*

KATRIN

*(At her desk)*

Nobody knew where Uncle Chris lived. That was part of the mystery about him. He used to roam up and down the state buying up farms and ranches that had gone to pieces, and bullying them back into prosperity. Then he'd sell at a profit and move on again. Two or three times a year he'd descend on the city in his automobile and come roaring and stamping into our house.

*(Her light dims)*

*(The sound of a very old and noisy Ford car changing gears is heard off L. A grinding and screaming as it comes to a standstill. Then UNCLE CHRIS' VOICE, shouting)*

UNCLE CHRIS' VOICE

Marta! Lars! Children—vere are you?

*(The curtains part on the kitchen again. Outside in the street is Uncle Chris' car—an antique model. A woman is seated beside the empty driver's seat. UNCLE CHRIS is knocking on the house door. He is an elderly, powerful, swarthy man with a limp. In the kitchen, NELS and CHRISTINE are cowering)*

UNCLE CHRIS

Marta! Lars!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

(*Scared*)

It's Uncle Chris.

NELS

(*Equally so*)

I know.

CHRISTINE

What'll we do?

UNCLE CHRIS

Is nobody home? Hey, there—is nobody home?

(*Banging on the door*)

Hey—someone—answer the door.

(*He tries the door handle; it opens and he strides, limpingly, in. He has a strong accent, and uses the Norwegian pronunciation of the children's names.*)

So, vat is—you do not answer the door? You do not hear me calling?

(*The CHILDREN cower silently*)

I say, you do not hear me calling? I do not call loud enough?

CHRISTINE

Y-yes, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

Which yes? Yes, you do not hear me—or yes I do not call loud enough?

NELS

We heard you, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

Then why you do not come?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

We . . . we were just going to.

(KATRIN has left her desk and come up the steps)

UNCLE CHRIS

Let me look at you. You too, Katrinë, do not stand there —come and let me look at you.

(They line up as though for inspection. He thumps NELS between the shoulder blades)

Stand tall!

(They all straighten up)

Um-hum. By the dresser, where the marks are.

(NELS goes to the wall by the dresser. UNCLE CHRIS compares his mark with the previous one—and makes a new one on the wall, writing by it)

Two inches. Two inches in . . .

(Examining the date)

Six months. Is good. Christinë.

(CHRISTINE replaces NELS)

Show me your teeth.

(She does so)

You brush them goot?

(She nods)

Nils, there is a box of oranges in the automobile. You fetch them in.

(NELS goes out L. UNCLE CHRIS measures CHRISTINE)

I REMEMBER MAMA

Where is the little von? Dagmar?

KATRIN

She's sick, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Arrested)*

Sick? What is the matter with her?

KATRIN

It's her ear. She's had an earache for two days. Bad ear-ache. Mama sent for the doctor.

UNCLE CHRIS

Goot doctor? What he say?

KATRIN

He's in there now.

*(She points off, back L. Meanwhile CHRISTINE has remained standing by the wall, afraid to move)*

UNCLE CHRIS

I go in.

*(He starts to the door back L., but MAMA and DR. JOHNSON come into the room as he does so. During this NELS has gone to the car, and with nervous smiles at the woman seated by the driver's seat, has heaved out a huge box of oranges. He returns with the oranges during the ensuing scene)*

MAMA

*(Greeting him)*

Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

How is with Dagmar?

MAMA

Is bad. Doctor, this is my Uncle, Mr. Halvorsen.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

DOCTOR

How do you do, sir?

UNCLE CHRIS

What is with the child?

DOCTOR

We must get her to a hospital. At once. We'll have to operate.

MAMA

Operate?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid so.

MAMA

Can wait? Until my husband comes home from work?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid not. Her best chance is for us to operate immediately.

MAMA

*(After a second)*

We go.

*(She goes to the dresser for the Little Bank)*

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Who has watched her decision with approval, turns to the doctor)*

What is with the child?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid it's a mastoid.

UNCLE CHRIS

Ah . . . then you operate immediately.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

DOCTOR

*(Resenting this)*

That's what I said.

UNCLE CHRIS

Immediately!

MAMA

*(Who has poured the contents of the Little Bank onto the table)*

Doctor . . . is enough?

DOCTOR

I was thinking of the County Hospital.

MAMA

No. No. We pay. Is enough?

KATRIN

If there isn't, we can go to the Bank.

CHRISTINE

We've got a Bank Account.

MAMA

Is enough without we go to the Bank, Doctor? My husband is carpenter. Make good money.

UNCLE CHRIS

If there is need of money, *I* pay.

DOCTOR

*(Mainly in dislike of Uncle Chris)*

It'll be all right. We'll take her to the Clinic. You pay what you can afford.

UNCLE CHRIS

Goot. Goot. I have a patient there already. My nephew, Arne. They operate this morning on his knee.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

DOCTOR

Are you a physician, sir?

UNCLE CHRIS

I am better physician than most doctors. Nils, there, my other nephew, he become doctor when he grow up.

(NELS *looks up, surprised*)

DOCTOR

(*Chillily*)

Oh, indeed . . . very interesting. Well, now, if you will have the child at the Clinic in . . . shall we say an hour's time. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

The child will be at the Clinic in *ten minutes'* time. I haf my automobile.

DOCTOR

I can hardly make arrangements in ten minutes.

UNCLE CHRIS

*I make arrangements. I know doctors.*

MAMA

Uncle Chris, Dr. Johnson arrange. He is good doctor.

DOCTOR

(*Ironically*)

Thank you, Madam.

MAMA

You go, Doctor. We come.

DOCTOR

Very well, in an hour, then. And Dagmar will be well taken care of, I promise you. I will do the operation myself.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

I watch.

DOCTOR

You will do no such thing, sir.

UNCLE CHRIS

Always I watch operations. I am head of family.

DOCTOR

I allow no one to attend my operations.

UNCLE CHRIS

Are so bad?

DOCTOR

(*To Mama*)

Mrs. Hanson, if I am to undertake this operation and the care of your child, it must be on the strict understanding that this gentleman does not come near either me or my patient.

MAMA

Yes, Doctor, I talk to him. . . . You go to hospital now, please.

DOCTOR

Very well. But you understand . . . nowhere near me, or I withdraw from the case.

(*He goes*)

UNCLE CHRIS

I go see Dagmar.

MAMA

Wait. Uncle Chris, is kind of you, but Dagmar is sick. You frighten her.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

I frighten her?

MAMA

Yes, Uncle Chris. You frighten everyone. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Amazed*)

I??

MAMA

Everyone but me. Even the girls. . . . Jenny, Sigrid, Trina . . . they are frightened of you.

UNCLE CHRIS

The girls! Women! Pff!

MAMA

And the children, too. So Nels and I get Dagmar. You drive us to hospital in your automobile, but you do not frighten Dagmar. And you leave Doctor alone. Dr. Johnson is *fine* doctor. You come with me, Nels. You carry Dagmar.

(*NELS and MAMA go out back L. UNCLE CHRIS stands in amazement and puzzlement. The two GIRLS watch him, hardly daring to move*)

UNCLE CHRIS

Is true? I frighten you? Christinë . . . Katrinë . . . you are frightened of me? Come, I ask you. Tell me the truth. You are frightened of me?

KATRIN

(*Tremulously*)

A . . . a little, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

No? And you, Christinë?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

Y . . . yes, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

But Nils . . . Nils is a boy . . . he is not frightened?

CHRISTINE

Not . . . not as much as we are. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

But he is frightened?

CHRISTINE

Yes, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

But, why? What is there to be frightened of? I am your Uncle Chris . . . why do I frighten you?

CHRISTINE

I don't know.

UNCLE CHRIS

But that is bad. Very bad. The Aunts, yes, I like to frighten them.

(THE GIRLS *giggle*)

That makes you laugh. You do not like the Aunts? Come, tell me. You do not like the Aunts? Say!

KATRIN

Not . . . very much, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

And which do you not like the most? Jenny . . . Sigrid . . . Trina. . . . Tell me—huh?

KATRIN

I think I like Aunt Jenny least. She's so . . . so bossy.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

I can't stand Aunt Sigrid. Always whining and complaining.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(With a great roar of laughter)*

Is good. Jenny, bossy. Sigrid, whining. Is true! But your Mama, she is different. And she cook goot. The Aunts, they cannot cook at all. Only you do not tell your Mama we have talked of them so. It is a secret, for us. Then you cannot be frightened of me any more . . . when we have secret. I tell you my secret, too. I do not like the Aunts. And so that they do not bother me, I frighten them and shout at them. You I do not shout at if you are goot children, and clean your teeth goot, and eat your oranges.

*(He takes out a snuff-box and partakes of its contents)*

*(On the cue "You I do not shout at" the posse of AUNTS appears, in outdoor clothes, accompanied by MR. THORKELSON, a terrified little man. They come in down L. and start up to the house)*

SIGRID

*(Stopping in the street)*

Jenny. Do you see what I see? A woman, in his automobile.

JENNY

How shameful!

SIGRID

Ought we to bow?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

Bow? To a woman like that? We cut her. That's what we do. I'll show you.

*(She strides to the front door, ignoring the woman in the car, and enters the house. The others follow)*

JENNY

*(Entering)*

Uncle Chris, Sigrid has something to say to you.

SIGRID

*(With false bravery)*

Uncle Chris, you took Arne to the hospital. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

Yes, I take Arne to the hospital. And now we take Dagmar to the hospital, so you do not clutter up the place.

JENNY

What's the matter with Dagmar?

CHRISTINE

It's her ear. Dr. Johnson's going to operate.

SIGRID

*(Catching her favorite word)*

Operate? This is some more of Uncle Chris' doings. Did you hear what he did to Arne?

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Turning on her)*

Sigrid, you are a whining old fool, and you get out of here. . . .

SIGRID

*(Deflating)*

We'd better go, Jenny. . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

*(Stoutly)*

No . . . there has been enough of these high-handed goings on. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

And you, Jenny . . . you are a bossy old fool, and you get out of here, too, and we take Dagmar to hospital.

*(NELS enters, carrying DAGMAR in his arms, wrapped in a blanket)*

You got her goot, Nils?

NELS

Sure, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

We go.

JENNY

*(Getting between them and the door)*

No! You are going to hear me out.

*(Weakening)*

That is, you are going to hear *Sigrid* out. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

If you do not get out of the way of the door before I count three, I trow you out. And *Sigrid*, too, as big as she is. Von. . . .

*(SIGRID moves)*

Two. . . .

*(JENNY moves. He looks back at the children with a wink and a smile)*

Is goot! You put her in back of the car, Nils.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

(NELS goes out, carrying DAGMAR, and lifts her into the car. UNCLE CHRIS follows and starts cranking)

TRINA

(Running to the door after him, with MR. THORKELSON)

But, Uncle Chris, I want to introduce Mr. Thorkelson. . . .

(But UNCLE CHRIS ignores her, continuing to crank. She returns crestfallen into the room with MR. THORKELSON. MAMA re-enters back L., wearing hat and coat and carrying a cheap little overnight case)

MAMA

Jenny . . . Trina, we go to hospital.

(She goes to KATRIN and CHRISTINE)

You will be good children until Mama comes home?

THE GIRLS

Sure, Mama.

UNCLE CHRIS

(Calling from the car)

Marta, we go!

MAMA

(Calling back)

I come!

(She turns to the children again)

There is milk in the cooler, and fruit and cookies for your lunch.

CHRISTINE

We'll be all right, Mama. Don't worry.

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

I go now.

*(She starts for the door)*

SIGRID

*(Stopping her)*

Marta!

MAMA

What is it?

SIGRID

You *can't* go in his automobile.

MAMA

Why not?

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Calling again)*

Marta, we go!

MAMA

I come!

SIGRID

Because . . . because *she's* in it. The . . . the woman!

MAMA

So it will kill me, or Dagmar, if we sit in the automobile with her? I have see her. She looks nice woman.

*(Calling off, as she goes)*

I come!

UNCLE CHRIS

We go!

*(She climbs into the rear of the car, which backs noisily off during the next speeches)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MR. THORKELSON

*(In a low whisper to TRINA)*

Is that woman his wife?

TRINA

*(Nervously)*

Yes. . . .

MR. THORKELSON

Yes?

TRINA

*(Whispering back, loudly)*

No!

JENNY

*(To the girls)*

Don't stand there gaping like that, girls.

*(She shoos them into the pantry)*

Go away! Go away!

*(The girls go. JENNY turns and sees the disappearing car through the open door.)*

Oh! They've gone! We go after them! Sigrid, you lead the way!

*(She gives SIGRID a push and the four go out, with JENNY dragging MR. THORKELSON, and TRINA following. Blackout. The travelers close)*

*(Spot on R. turntable, representing a kind of closet-room. Roller-skates hanging on the wall. KATRIN and CHRISTINE are seated on a small kitchen stepladder with glasses of milk, and cookies on plates)*

KATRIN

How long have they been gone now?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

About three hours. And I wish you wouldn't keep asking that.

KATRIN

How long do operations take? I heard Aunt Sigrid telling about Mrs. Bergman who was five hours on the table.

CHRISTINE

Aunt Sigrid's friends always have everything worse than anyone else. And it gets worse each time she tells it, too.

(KATRIN *smiles—drinks some milk and eats a cookie*)

KATRIN

*(With a certain melancholy enjoyment)*

The house feels lonesome, doesn't it—without Mama? It's like in a book. "The sisters sat huddled in the empty house, waiting for the verdict that was to spell life or death to the little family."

CHRISTINE

Oh, don't talk such nonsense.

KATRIN

It's not nonsense.

CHRISTINE

It is, too. In the first place, we're not a little family. We're a big one. And who said anything about life or death, anyway? Always trying to make everything so dramatic!

KATRIN

Well, it *is* dramatic.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

It's not. It's just . . . well, worrying. But you don't have to make a tragedy out of it.

(*Pause*)

KATRIN

You're not eating anything.

CHRISTINE

I know that.

KATRIN

You're not drinking your milk, either. Aren't you hungry?

CHRISTINE

No. And you wouldn't be, either, if you'd any feeling for Mama and Dagmar, instead of just heartlessly sitting there eating and enjoying making a story out of it.

KATRIN

Oh, Chris, I'm not heartless. I do have feeling for them. I can't help it if it goes into words like that. Everything always does with me. But it doesn't mean I don't feel it. And I think we *ought* to eat. I think Mama would want us to.

(*Pause. CHRISTINE hesitates a moment, then takes a bite of a cookie. They both eat in silence. The light dims on them, and the turntable revolves out*)

*The travelers part on the hospital corridor. A main back flat representing the wall, running diagonally up from the front of the main stage L. towards the back. Down front L. is a bench, on which MAMA and NELS are sitting, holding hands, looking off.*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*Below the bench is the elevator, and above the bench, set back a little, is a closet for brooms and mops, etc. The reception desk, at which a nurse is sitting, is R.C., towards the front. The wall goes up into darkness, and behind the nurse's desk is darkness.*

*As the curtains open, there is a hubbub down front by the nurse's desk, where the AUNTS are haranguing UNCLE CHRIS. MR. THORKELSON stands slightly in back of them)*

SIGRID

But, Uncle Chris, I tell you I must see him!

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Storming)*

You don't understand English? No visitors for twenty-four hours.

SIGRID

But *you've* seen him.

UNCLE CHRIS

I am not visitor. I am exception.

SIGRID

Well, then, his mother should be an exception, too. I'll see the doctor.

UNCLE CHRIS

I have seen doctor. I have told him you are not goot for Arne.

SIGRID

Not good for my own son. . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

Not goot at all. You cry over him. I go now.

*(He starts to do so, but JENNY pushes TRINA forward)*

TRINA

*(With desperate courage)*

Uncle Chris . . . Uncle Chris . . . I *must* speak to you.

UNCLE CHRIS

I have business.

TRINA

But, Uncle Chris. . . . I want to get married.

UNCLE CHRIS

Well, then, *get* married.

*(He starts off again)*

TRINA

No, wait, I . . . I want to marry Mr. Thorkelson. Here.

*(She produces him from behind her)*

Peter, this is Uncle Chris. Uncle Chris, this is Mr. Thorkelson.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Staring at him)*

So?

MR. THORKELSON

How are you, sir?

UNCLE CHRIS

Busy.

*(He turns again)*

TRINA

Please, Uncle Chris. . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

What is? You want to marry him? All right, marry him.  
I have other things to think about.

TRINA

*(Eagerly)*

Then . . . then you give your permission?

UNCLE CHRIS

Yes, I give my permission. If you want to be a fool, I  
cannot stop you.

TRINA

*(Gratefully)*

Oh, thank you, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

So. Is all?

TRINA

*(Anxious to escape)*

Yes, I think is all.

JENNY

*(Firmly)*

No!!

UNCLE CHRIS

No?

*(MR. THORKELSON is pushed forward again)*

MR. THORKELSON

Well, there . . . there was a little something else. You  
see, Trina mentioned . . . well, in the old country it was  
always usual . . . and after all, we do all come from the  
old country. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

What is it? What you want?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MR. THORKELSON

Well, it's a question of Trina's . . . well, not to mince matters . . . her dowry.

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Shouting*)

Her what?

MR. THORKELSON

(*Very faintly*)

Her dowry. . .

UNCLE CHRIS

Ah. Her dowry. Trina wants a dowry. She is forty-two years old. . . .

TRINA

(*Interrupting*)

No, Uncle Chris. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Without pausing*)

And it is not enough she gets husband. She must have dowry.

NURSE

(*Who has been trying to interrupt, now bangs on her desk*)

PLEASE! Would you mind going and discussing your family matters somewhere else? This is a hospital, not a marriage bureau!

UNCLE CHRIS

(*After glaring at the NURSE, turns to MR. THORKELSON*)

You come into waiting room. I talk to you about dowry.

(*He strides off into the darkness behind the nurse's*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

desk. MR. THORKELSON, with an appealing look back at TRINA, follows him. The AUNTS now remember MAMA, sitting on the bench, and cross to her)

JENNY

Did you hear that, Marta?

MAMA

(Out of a trance)

What?

JENNY

Uncle Chris.

MAMA

No, I do not hear. I wait for doctor. Is two hours since they take Dagmar to operating room. More.

SIGRID

Two hours? That's nothing! When Mrs. Bergman had her gall bladder removed she was six hours on the table.

MAMA

Sigrid, I do not want to hear about Mrs. Bergman. I do not want to hear about anything. I wait for doctor. Please, you go away now. You come this evening.

TRINA

But, Marta, you can't stay here all by yourself.

MAMA

I have Nels. Please, Trina . . . I wait for doctor . . . you go now.

JENNY

We go.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

Oh, but I must wait for Peter and Uncle Chris. . . .

JENNY

We'll go next door and have some coffee. Sigrid, do you have money?

SIGRID

Yes, I . . . I have a little.

JENNY

Good. Then I treat you. We'll be next door if you want us, Marta.

*(MAMA nods without looking at them, her eyes still fixed on the elevator door. The AUNTS leave, going down the steps from the stage as though they were the hospital steps, and off L.)*

*For a moment, the stage is quiet. Then a SCRUB-WOMAN enters from down R., carrying a mop and pail which she puts into the closet, and then leaves. The elevator door opens and a doctor in white coat comes out, followed by an orderly, carrying a tray of dressings. They disappear up R. behind the desk. MAMA rises, agitatedly, looking after them. Then DR. JOHNSON returns from R. front, carrying his hat and bag. He sees MAMA and crosses to her, C.)*

DOCTOR

Oh, Mrs. Hanson. . . .

MAMA

Doctor. . . .

DOCTOR

Well, Dagmar's fine. She came through it beautifully. She's back in bed now, sleeping off the anesthetic.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Thank you, Doctor.

*(She shakes hands with him)*

DOCTOR

You're very welcome.

MAMA

Is good of you, Doctor.

*(She shakes hands with him again)*

Where is she? I go to her now.

DOCTOR

Oh, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid that's against the rules. You shall see her tomorrow.

MAMA

Tomorrow? But, Doctor, she is so little. When she wakes she will be frightened.

DOCTOR

The nurses will take care of her. Excellent care. You needn't worry. You see, for the first twenty-four hours, clinic patients aren't allowed to see visitors. The wards must be kept quiet.

MAMA

I will not make a sound.

DOCTOR

I'm very sorry. Tomorrow. And now . . .

*(He glances at his watch)*

Good afternoon.

*(He puts on his hat and goes out L., down the steps and off)*

*(MAMA stands still a moment, looking after him)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Come, Nels. We go find Dagmar.

NELS

But, Mama, the doctor said . . .

MAMA

We find Dagmar.

*(She looks vaguely around her. Then goes to the nurse's desk)*

You tell me, please, where I can find my daughter?

NURSE

What name?

MAMA

Dagmar.

NELS

Dagmar Hanson.

NURSE

*(Looking at her record book)*

Hanson, Ward A. Along there.

*(She points upstage. MAMA starts to go up)*

Oh, just a moment.

*(MAMA returns)*

When did she come in?

MAMA

This morning. They just finish operation.

NURSE

Oh, well, then I'm afraid you can't see her today. No visitors for the first twenty-four hours.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Am not visitor. I am her Mama.

NURSE

I'm sorry, but it's against the rules.

MAMA

Just for one minute. Please.

NURSE

I'm sorry. It's against the rules.

(MAMA stands staring. NELS touches her arm. She looks at him, nods, trying to smile, then turns and walks with him to L. and down the steps)

MAMA

We must think of some way.

NELS

Mama, they'll let you see her tomorrow. They said so.

MAMA

If I don't see her today how will I know that all is well with her? What can I tell Papa when he comes home from work?

NELS

The nurses will look after her, Mama. Would you like to come next door for some coffee?

MAMA

(Shaking her head)

We go home. We have coffee at home. But I must see Dagmar today.

(She plods off L. with NELS) (The travelers close)

(Spot goes up on R. turntable. UNCLE CHRIS and MR. THORKELSON are seated on a bench and chair,

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*as in a waiting-room. A table with a potted plant is between them. A clock on the wall points to 2:30)*

UNCLE CHRIS

Well, it comes then to this. You love my niece, Trina?

(MR. THORKELSON, *very scared, gulps and nods*)

You want to marry her?

(MR. THORKELSON *nods again*)

You are in position to support her?

(MR. THORKELSON *nods again*)

Why, then, you want dowry?

(*No answer. He shouts*)

What for you want dowry?

MR. THORKELSON

Well . . . well, it would be a nice help. And it is customary.

UNCLE CHRIS

Is not customary. Who give dowries? Parents. Why? Because they are so glad they will not have to support their daughters any more, they pay money. I do not support Trina. I do not care if Trina gets married. Why then should I pay to have her married?

MR. THORKELSON

I never thought of it like that.

UNCLE CHRIS

Is insult to girl to pay dowry. If I do not give dowry, will you still marry Trina?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MR. THORKELSON

I . . . I don't know.

UNCLE CHRIS

You don't know? You don't know?? You think I let  
Trina marry a man who will not take her without  
dowry?

MR. THORKELSON

No, I suppose you wouldn't.

UNCLE CHRIS

What kind of man would that be? I ask you, what kind  
of man would that be?

MR. THORKELSON

(*Fascinated—helpless*)

Well, not a very nice kind of man.

UNCLE CHRIS

And are you that kind of man?

MR. THORKELSON

I . . . I don't think so.

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Conclusively*)

Then you don't want dowry!!

MR. THORKELSON

(*Giving up*)

No, I . . . I guess I don't.

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Slapping his back*)

Goot. Goot. You are goot man. I like you. I give you my

## I REMEMBER MAMA

blessing. And I send you veding present. I send you box of oranges!

*(While he is boisterously shaking Mr. Thorkelson's hand, blackout. Turntable revolves out)*

*(The curtains open on the kitchen. It is empty. MAMA and NELS come up the hill from the L. and let themselves into the house. There is silence as they take off their hats and coats)*

MAMA

*(After a moment)*

Where are the girls?

NELS

I guess they're upstairs.

*(Goes to door back L. and calls)*

Chris! Katrin!

GIRLS' VOICES

Coming!

NELS

Shall I make you some coffee?

*(MAMA shakes her head)*

You said you'd have coffee when you got home.

MAMA

Later. First I must think.

NELS

Mama, please don't worry like that. Dagmar's all right. You know she's all right.

*(THE GIRLS come in back L.)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

*(Trying to be casual)*

Well, Mama, everything all right?

MAMA

*(Nodding)*

Is all right. You have eaten?

KATRIN

Yes, Mama.

MAMA

You drink your milk?

CHRISTINE

Yes, Mama.

MAMA

Is good.

CHRISTINE

*(Seeing her face)*

Mama, something's the matter.

KATRIN

*(Over-dramatically)*

Mama, Dagmar's not—? She isn't—? Mama!

MAMA

No, Dagmar is fine. The doctor say she is fine.

*(She rises)*

What is time?

NELS

It's three o'clock.

MAMA

Three hours till Papa come.

*(She looks around and then goes slowly into the pantry, back R.)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

Nels, what is it? There *is* something the matter.

NELS

They wouldn't let Mama see Dagmar. It's a rule of the hospital.

CHRISTINE

But Dagmar's all right?

NELS

Oh, yes, she's all right.

CHRISTINE

(*Impatiently*)

Well, then . . . !

NELS

But Mama's very upset. She started talking to me in Norwegian in the street-car.

KATRIN

(*Emotionally*)

What can we do?

CHRISTINE

(*Coldly*)

You can't do anything. When will they let her see Dagmar?

NELS

Tomorrow.

CHRISTINE

Well, then, we'll just have to wait till tomorrow.

KATRIN

Chris, how can you be so callous? Can't you see that Mama's heart is breaking?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

No, I can't. And you can't, either. People's hearts don't break.

KATRIN

They do, too.

CHRISTINE

Only in books.

(MAMA comes back; she wears an apron, and carries a scrub brush and a bucket of hot water)

Why, Mama, what are you going to do?.

MAMA

I scrub the floor.

(She gets down on her knees)

CHRISTINE

But you scrubbed it yesterday.

MAMA

I scrub it again.

(She starts to do so)

KATRIN

But, Mama . . .

MAMA

(Bending low)

Comes a time when you've got to get down on your knees.

KATRIN

(To CHRISTINE)

Now do you believe me?

(CHRISTINE, suddenly unendurably moved, turns and rushes from the room)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

Mama, don't. Please don't. You must be tired.

KATRIN

*(Strangely)*

Let her alone, Nels.

*(They stand in silence watching MAMA scrub.  
Suddenly she stops)*

What is it, Mama? What is it?

MAMA

*(Sitting back on her haunches)*

I think of something!

*(Slowly)*

I think I think of something!

*(The lights dim and the curtains close on the kitchen)*

*(From down front L. UNCLE CHRIS' VOICE singing.  
The lights slowly come up on the L. turntable,  
showing ARNE (a child of about eight) in a hospital  
bed, with UNCLE CHRIS beside him)*

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Singing)*

"Ten t'ousand Svedes vent t'rough de veeds

At de battle of Coppen-hagen.

Ten t'ousand Svedes vent t'rough de veeds

Chasing vun Nor-ve-gan!"

ARNE

Uncle Chris!

UNCLE CHRIS

Yes, Arne?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

ARNE

Uncle Chris, does it *have* to hurt like this?

UNCLE CHRIS

If you vant it to be vell, and not to valk always like Uncle Chris, it does . . . for a little. Is very bad?

ARNE

It is . . . kinda. . . . Oo—oo . . . !

UNCLE CHRIS

Arne, don't you know any swear vords?

ARNE

W-what?

UNCLE CHRIS

Don't you know any swear vords?

ARNE

N-no, Uncle Chris. Not real ones.

UNCLE CHRIS

Then I tell you two fine vons to use when pain is bad. Are "Damn" and "Damittohell." You say them?

ARNE

N-now?

UNCLE CHRIS

No, not now. When pain comes again. You say them then. They help plenty. I know. I haf pain, too. I say them all the time. And if pain is *very* bad, you say, "Goddamittohell." But only if is *very* bad. Is bad now?

ARNE

No, it's . . . it's a little better.

UNCLE CHRIS

You sleep some now, maybe?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

ARNE

I'll try. Will . . . will you stay here, Uncle Chris?

UNCLE CHRIS

Sure. Sure. I stay here. You are not frightened of Uncle Chris?

ARNE

No. Not any more.

UNCLE CHRIS

Goot. Goot. You like I sing some more?

ARNE

If you wouldn't mind. But maybe something a little . . . well, quieter.

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Tenderly*)

Sure. Sure.

(*He begins quietly to sing a Norwegian lullaby; in the midst, ARNE cries out*)

ARNE

Oo—oo. . . . Oh, *damn*. Damn. Damittohell!

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Delighted*)

Goot! It helps—eh?

ARNE

(*With pleased surprise*)

Yes—yes.

UNCLE CHRIS

Then you sleep some!

(*He fixes Arne's pillows for him, and resumes the lullaby, seated on his chair beside the bed. After*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*another verse, he leans over, assuring himself that the child is asleep, and then very quietly, without interrupting his singing, takes a flask from his pocket and lifts it to his lips, as the light dims. The table revolves out)*

*(The curtains part on the hospital corridor again. There is a different NURSE now at the reception desk, talking on the telephone as MAMA and KATRIN come in from L. and up the steps)*

MAMA

*(As they come up, in an undertone)*

Is not the same nurse. Katrin, you take my hat and coat.

*(She takes them off, revealing that she still wears her apron)*

KATRIN

But, Mama, won't they . . .

MAMA

*(Interrupting, finger to lips)*

Ssh! You let me go ahead. You wait on bench for me.

*(She goes to the closet door above the bench and opens it. KATRIN stares after her in trepidation. MAMA takes out a damp mop and pail, and gets down on her knees in front of the nurse's desk, starting to clean the floor. The NURSE looks up. MAMA catches her eye)*

MAMA

*(Brightly)*

Very dirty floors.

NURSE

Yes, I'm glad they've finally decided to clean them. Aren't you working late?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Quickly, lowering her head)*

Floors need cleaning.

*(She pushes her way, crawling on hands and knees, up behind the desk, and disappears up the corridor, still scrubbing. KATRIN steals to the bench, where she sits, still clutching Mama's hat and coat, looking interestedly around her. The light dims, leaving her in a single spot, as she starts to talk to herself)*

KATRIN

*(To herself)*

“The Hospital” . . . A poem by Katrin Hanson.

*(She starts to improvise)*

“She waited, fearful, in the hall,  
And held her bated breath.”

Breath—yes, that'll rhyme with death.

*(She repeats the first two lines)*

“She waited fearful in the hall

And held her bated breath.

She trembled at the least footfall,

And kept her mind on death.”

*(She gets a piece of paper and pencil from her pocket and begins to scribble, as a NURSE comes out of the elevator, carrying some charts, which she takes to the desk, and then goes out down R. KATRIN goes on with her poem)*

“Ah, God, 'twas agony to wait.

To wait and watch and wonder. . . .”

Wonder—under—bunder—funder—sunder. Sunder!

*(Nods to herself and goes on again)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

“To wait and watch and wonder,  
About her infant sister’s fate,  
If Death’s life’s bonds would sunder.”

*(Then to herself again, looking front)*

That’s beautiful. Yes, but it isn’t true. Dagmar isn’t dying. It’s funny—I don’t want her to die—and yet when Mama said she was all right, I was almost—well, almost disappointed. It wasn’t exciting any more. Maybe Christine’s right, and I haven’t any heart. How awful! “The girl without a heart.” That’d be a nice title for a story. “The girl without a heart sat in the hospital corridor. . . .”

*(The lights come up again as UNCLE CHRIS appears, up R. behind the desk. He wears his hat and is more than a little drunk. He sees KATRIN)*

UNCLE CHRIS

Katrinë! What you do here?

*(He sits on the bench beside her)*

KATRIN

*(Nervously)*

I’m waiting for Mama.

UNCLE CHRIS

Where is she?

KATRIN

*(Scared)*

I . . . I don’t know.

UNCLE CHRIS

What you mean . . . you don’t know?

KATRIN

*(Whispering)*

I think . . . I think she’s seeing Dagmar.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Shaking his head)*

Is first day. They do not allow visitors first day.

KATRIN

*(Trying to make him aware of the NURSE)*

I know. But I think that's where she is.

UNCLE CHRIS

Where is Dagmar?

KATRIN

I don't know.

*(UNCLE CHRIS rises and goes to the NURSE at the desk)*

UNCLE CHRIS

In what room is my great-niece, Dagmar Hanson?

NURSE

*(Looking at her book)*

Hanson . . . Hanson . . . when did she come in?

UNCLE CHRIS

This morning.

NURSE

Oh, yes. Were you wanting to see her?

UNCLE CHRIS

What room is she in?

NURSE

I asked were you wanting to see her.

UNCLE CHRIS

And I ask what room she is in.

NURSE

We don't allow visitors the first day.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

Have I said I want to visit her? I ask what room she is in.

NURSE

Are you by any chance, Mr. . . .

*(Looking at her book)*

Halvorsen?

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Proudly, and correcting her pronunciation)*

Christopher Halvorsen.

NURSE

Did you say you were her uncle?

UNCLE CHRIS

Her great-uncle.

NURSE

Well, then, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about her.

UNCLE CHRIS

Why not?

NURSE

Orders.

UNCLE CHRIS

Whose orders?

NURSE

Dr. Johnson's. There's a special note here. Patient's uncle, Mr. Halvorsen, not to be admitted or given information under any circumstances.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(After a moment's angry stupefaction)*

Goddammittohell!

*(He strides away down L., taking out his flask, and*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*shaking it, only to find it empty. MAMA returns from up R., carrying the mop and pail, walking now and smiling triumphantly)*

MAMA

*(To the NURSE)*

Thank you.

*(She replaces the mop and pail in the closet, and then sees UNCLE CHRIS)*

Uncle Chris, Dagmar is fine!

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Coming back to her, amazed)*

You see her?

MAMA

Sure, Uncle Chris, I see her.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Reiterating, incredulous)*

You see Dagmar?!

MAMA

Sure.

*(She takes her hat from KATRIN and starts to put it on)*

Is fine hospital. But such floors! A mop is never good. Floors should be scrubbed with a brush. We go home. Uncle Chris, you come with us? I make coffee.

UNCLE CHRIS

Pah! Vot good is coffee? I go get drink.

MAMA

*(Reprovingly)*

Uncle Chris!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

Marta, you are fine voman. Fine. But I go get drink. I get drunk.

MAMA

*(Quickly aside to KATRIN)*

His leg hurts him.

UNCLE CHRIS

And you do not make excuses for me! I get drunk because I like it.

MAMA

*(Conciliating him)*

Sure, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Shouting)*

I like it!

*(Then, with a change)*

No, is not true. You know is not true. I do not like to get drunk at all. But I do not like to come home with you, either.

*(Growing slightly maudlin)*

You have family. Is fine thing. You do not know how fine. Katrinë, one day when you grow up, maybe you know what a fine thing family is. I haf no family.

KATRIN

But, Uncle Chris, Mama's always said you were the *head* of the family.

UNCLE CHRIS

Sure. Sure. I am head of the family, but I haf no family. So I go get drunk. You understand, Marta?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Sure, Uncle Chris. You go get drunk.

*(Sharply)*

But don't you feel sorry for yourself!

*(UNCLE CHRIS glares at her a moment, then strides off R., boisterously singing his song of "Ten Thousand Swedes." MAMA watches him go, then takes her coat from KATRIN)*

Is fine man. Has fine ideas about family.

*(KATRIN helps her on with her coat)*

I can tell Papa now that Dagmar is fine. She wake while I am with her. I explain rules to her. She will not expect us now until tomorrow afternoon.

KATRIN

You won't try and see her again before that?

MAMA

*(Gravely)*

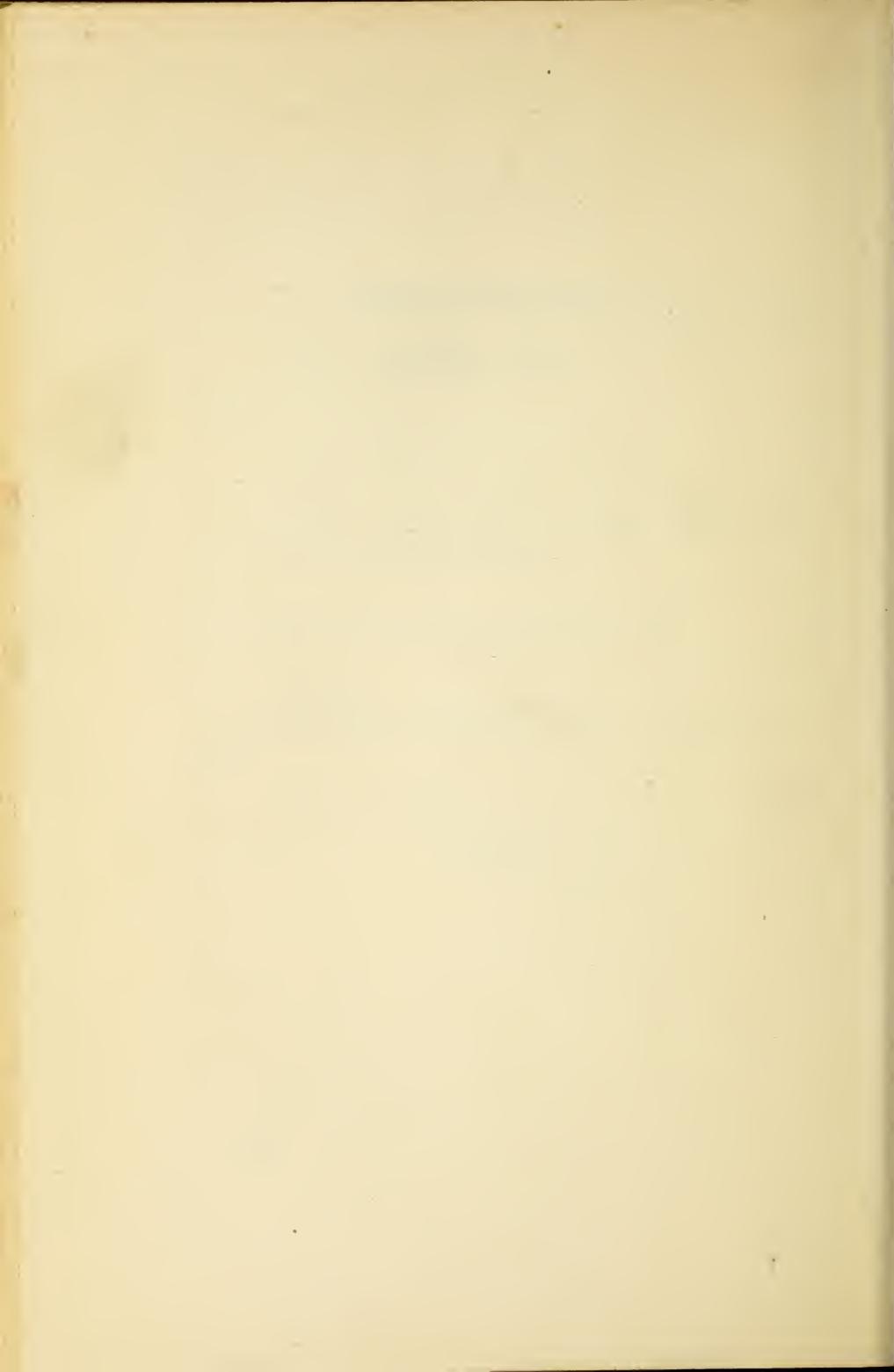
No. That would be against the rules! Come. We go home.

*(They go off L.)*

CURTAIN

**I REMEMBER MAMA**

*ACT TWO*



## ACT TWO

SCENE: *Opening, exactly as in Act One. KATRIN at her desk.*

KATRIN

*(Reading)*

"It wasn't very often that I could get Mama to talk—about herself, or her life in the old country, or what she felt about things. You had to catch her unawares, or when she had nothing to do, which was very, very seldom. I don't think I can ever remember seeing Mama unoccupied."

*(Laying down the manuscript and looking out front)*

I do remember one occasion, though. It was the day before Dagmar came home from the hospital. And as we left, Mama suggested treating me to an ice-cream soda.

*(She rises, gets her hat from beside her—a school girl hat—puts it on and crosses C. while she speaks the next lines)*

She had never done such a thing before, and I remember how proud it made me feel—just to sit and talk to her quietly like a grown-up person. It was a kind of special treat-moment in my life that I'll always remember—quite apart from the soda, which was wonderful.

*(She has reached C. stage now. MAMA has come from between the curtains, and starts down the steps)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Katrin, you like we go next door, and I treat you to an ice-cream soda?

KATRIN

*(Young now, and overcome)*

Mama—do you mean it?

MAMA

Sure. We celebrate. We celebrate that Dagmar is well, and coming home again.

*(They cross to the L., where the turntable represents a drugstore, with a table and two chairs at which they seat themselves)*

What you like to have, Katrin?

KATRIN

I think a chocolate . . . no, a strawberry . . . no, a chocolate soda.

MAMA

*(Smiling)*

You are sure?

KATRIN

*(Gravely)*

I think so. But, Mama, can we *afford* it?

MAMA

I think this once we can afford it.

*(The SODA CLERK appears from L.)*

SODA CLERK

What's it going to be, ladies?

MAMA

A chocolate ice-cream soda, please—and a cup of coffee.

*(The SODA CLERK goes)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

Mama, he called us "ladies"!

(MAMA *smiles*)

—Why aren't you having a soda, too?

MAMA

Better I like coffee.

KATRIN

When can I drink coffee?

MAMA

When you are grown up.

KATRIN

When I'm eighteen?

MAMA

Maybe before that.

KATRIN

When I graduate?

MAMA

Maybe. I don't know. Comes the day you are grown up,  
Papa and I will know.

KATRIN

Is coffee really nicer than a soda?

MAMA

When you are grown up, it is.

KATRIN

Did you used to like sodas better . . . before you were  
grown up?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

We didn't have sodas before I was grown up. It was in the old country.

KATRIN

*(Incredulous)*

You mean they don't have sodas in Norway?

MAMA

Now, maybe. Now I think they have many things from America. But not when I was little girl.

*(The SODA CLERK brings the soda and the coffee)*

SODA CLERK

There you are, folks.

*(He sets them and departs)*

KATRIN

*(After a good pull at the soda)*

Mama, do you ever want to go back to the old country?

MAMA

I like to go back once to look, maybe. To see the mountains and the fjords. I like to show them once to you all. When Dagmar is big, maybe we all go back once . . . one summer . . . like tourists. But that is how it would be. I would be tourist there now. There is no one I would know any more. And maybe we see the little house where Papa and I live when we first marry. And . . .

*(Her eyes grow misty and reminiscent)*  
something else I would look at.

KATRIN

What is that?

*(MAMA does not answer)*

What would you look at, Mama?

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Katrin, you do not know you have brother? Besides Nels?

KATRIN

No! A brother? In Norway? Mama. . . .

MAMA

He is my first baby. I am eighteen when he is born.

KATRIN

Is he there now?

MAMA

*(Simply)*

He is dead.

KATRIN

*(Disappointed)*

Oh. I thought you meant . . . I thought you meant a real brother. A long-lost one, like in stories. When did he die?

MAMA

When he is two years old. It is his grave I would like to see again.

*(She is suddenly near tears, biting her lip and stirring her coffee violently, spilling a few drops on her suit. She gets her handkerchief from her pocketbook, dabs at her skirt, then briefly at her nose, then she returns the handkerchief and turns to KATRIN again)*

*(Matter-of-factly)*

Is good, your ice-cream soda?

KATRIN

*(More interested now in MAMA than in it)*

Yes. Mama . . . have you had a very *hard* life?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Surprised)*

Hard? No. No life is easy all the time. It is not meant to be.

KATRIN

But . . . rich people . . . aren't *their* lives easy?

MAMA

I don't know, Katrin. I have never known rich people. But I see them sometimes in stores and in the streets, and they do not *look* as if they were easy.

KATRIN

Wouldn't you like to be rich?

MAMA

I would like to be rich the way I would like to be ten feet high. Would be good for some things—bad for others.

KATRIN

But didn't you come to America to *get* rich?

MAMA

*(Shocked)*

No. We come to America because they are all here—all the others. Is good for families to be together.

KATRIN

And did you like it right away?

MAMA

Right away. When we get off the ferry boat and I see San Francisco and all the family, I say: "Is like Norway," only it is better than Norway. And then you are all born here, and I become American citizen. But not to get rich.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

I want to be rich. Rich and famous. I'd buy you your warm coat. When are you going to get that coat, Mama?

MAMA

Soon now, maybe—when we pay doctor, and Mr. Hyde pay his rent. I think now I *must* ask him. I ask him tomorrow, after Dagmar comes home.

KATRIN

When I'm rich and famous, I'll buy you lovely clothes. White satin gowns with long trains to them. And jew- elry. I'll buy you a pearl necklace.

MAMA

We talk too much!

*(She signs to the SODA CLERK)*

Come, finish your soda. We must go home.

*(The SODA CLERK comes)*

How much it is, please?

SODA CLERK

Fifteen cents.

MAMA

Here are two dimes. You keep the nickel. And thank you. Was good coffee.

*(They start out and up the steps towards the curtains C.)*

Tomorrow Dagmar will be home again. And, Katrin, you see Uncle Elizabeth is there. This afternoon again she was asking for him. You keep Uncle Elizabeth in the house all day until she comes home.

*(They disappear behind the curtains)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*(After a second, the howls of a cat in pain are heard from behind the curtains—low at first, then rising to a heart-rending volume, and then diminishing again as the curtains part on the kitchen once more. MAMA, PAPA, and DAGMAR are entering the house)*

DAGMAR

*(Standing on threshold, transfixed)*

It's Uncle Elizabeth, welcoming me home! That's his song of welcome. Where is he, Mama?

*(She looks around for the source of the howls)*

MAMA

He is in the pantry. . . .

*(As DAGMAR starts to rush thither)*

But wait . . . wait a minute, Dagmar. I must tell you. Uncle Elizabeth is . . . sick.

DAGMAR

Sick? What's the matter with him?

PAPA

He has been in fight. Last night. He come home this morning very sick indeed.

*(DAGMAR starts for the pantry door, back R., as NELS comes out)*

MAMA

Nels, how is Uncle Elizabeth? Nels, has been doctoring him.

NELS

He's pretty bad, Mama. I've dressed all his wounds again with boric acid, but . . .

I REMEMBER MAMA

(As DAGMAR tries to get past him)

I wouldn't go and see him now, baby.

DAGMAR

I've got to. He's *my* cat. I haven't seen him in a whole month. More.

(She runs into the pantry and disappears)

MAMA

Nels, what you think?

NELS

I think we ought to have had him put away before she came home.

MAMA

But she would have been so unhappy if he was not here at all.

NELS

She'll be unhappier still if he dies.

(Another howl is heard from the pantry, and then DAGMAR comes rushing back)

DAGMAR

Mama, what happened to him? What happened to him? Oh, Mama . . . when I tried to pick him up, his bandage slipped over his eye. It was bleeding. Oh, Mama, it looked awful. Oh . . .

(She starts to cry)

MAMA

(Fondling her)

He look like that all over. Nels, you go see to his eye again.

(Wearily, NELS returns to the pantry)

I REMEMBER MAMA

Listen, Dagmar . . . *Lille Ven* . . . would it not be better for the poor thing to go quietly to sleep?

DAGMAR

You mean—go to sleep and never wake up again?

(MAMA nods gently)

No.

PAPA

I think he die, anyway. Nels try to make him well. But I do not think he can.

DAGMAR

Mama can. Mama can do everything.

(*Another howl from offstage. She clutches MAMA agonizedly*)

Make him live, Mama. Make him well again. *Please!*

MAMA

We see. Let us see how he gets through the night. And now, Dagmar, you must go to bed. I bring you your supper.

DAGMAR

But you will fix Uncle Elizabeth? You promise, Mama?

MAMA

I promise I try. Go now.

(DAGMAR goes out, back L.)

I must fix her supper.

(*She starts for the pantry. Howls again. She and PAPA stand and look at each other. NELS comes out*)

I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

Mama, it's just cruelty, keeping that cat alive.

MAMA

I know.

PAPA

*(As another howl, the loudest yet, emerges)*

You say we see how the cat get through the night. I ask you how do *we* get through the night? Is no use, Marta. We must put the cat to sleep. Nels, you go to the drug-store, and get something. Some chloroform, maybe.

*(He gives him a coin)*

NELS

How much shall I get?

PAPA

You ask the man. You tell him it is for a cat. He knows.

*(NELS goes out L. and down the street into the wings)*

*(Looking at Mama's face)*

Is best. Is the only thing.

MAMA

I know. But poor Dagmar. It is sad homecoming for her. And she has been so good in hospital. Never once she cry.

*(She pulls herself together)*

I get her supper.

*(Another howl from offstage)*

And I take the cat outside. Right outside, where we . . . where *Dagmar* cannot hear him.

*(She goes into the pantry. PAPA takes a folded*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*newspaper from his pocket, puts on his glasses and starts to read. The door, back L., opens gently and MR. HYDE peeps out. He wears his hat and coat and carries his suitcase and a letter. PAPA has his back to him. MR. HYDE lays the letter on the dresser and then starts to tiptoe across to the door. Then PAPA sees him)*

PAPA

You go out, Mr. Hyde?

MR. HYDE

*(Pretending surprise)*

Oh. . . . Oh, I did not see you, Mr. Hanson.

*(He puts down the suitcase)*

I did not know you were back. As a matter of fact, I . . . I was about to leave this letter for you.

*(He fetches it)*

The fact is . . . I . . . I have been called away.

PAPA

So?

MR. HYDE

A letter I received this morning necessitates my departure. My immediate departure.

PAPA

I am sorry.

*(MAMA returns with a tray, on which are milk, bread, butter, and jelly)*

Mama, Mr. Hyde says he goes away.

MAMA

*(Coming to the table with the tray)*

Is true?

I REMEMBER MAMA

MR. HYDE

Alas, dear Madam, yes. 'Tis true, 'tis pity. And pity 'tis,  
'tis true. You will find here . . .

*(He presents the letter)*

my check for all I owe you, and a note expressing my  
profoundest thanks for all your most kind hospitality.  
You will say good-by to the children for me?

*(He bows, as MAMA takes the letter)*

MAMA

*(Distressed)*

Sure. Sure.

MR. HYDE

*(Bowing again)*

Madam, my deepest gratitude.

*(He kisses her hand. MAMA looks astonished. He bows to PAPA)*

Sir—my sincerest admiration!

*(He opens the street door)*

It has been a privilege. Ave Atque Vale! Hail and fare-well!

*(He makes a gesture and goes)*

MAMA

Was wonderful man! Is too bad.

*(She opens the letter, takes out the check)*

PAPA

How much is the check for?

MAMA

Hundred ten dollar! Is four months.

PAPA

Good. Good.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Is wonderful. Now we pay doctor everything.

PAPA

And you buy your warm coat. With fur now, maybe.

MAMA

*(Sadly)*

But there will be no more reading. You take the check,  
Lars. You get the money?

PAPA

*(Taking it)*

Sure, I get it. What does he say in his letter?

MAMA

You read it while I fix supper for Dagmar.

*(She starts to butter the bread, and spread jelly,  
while PAPA reads)*

PAPA

*(Reading)*

“Dear Friends, I find myself compelled to take a somewhat hasty departure from this house of happiness. . . .”

MAMA

Is beautiful letter.

PAPA

*(Continuing)*

“I am leaving you my library for the children. . . .”

MAMA

He leaves his books?

PAPA

He says so.

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

But is wonderful. Go see, Lars. See if they are in his room.

(PAPA lays down the letter and goes out back L.  
NELS and CHRISTINE appear down L., coming up to  
the house. CHRISTINE carries school books)

CHRISTINE

I'm sure it was him, Nels. Carrying his suitcase, and getting on the cable-car. I'm sure he's going away.

NELS

Well, I hope he's paid Mama.

(They open the street door)

CHRISTINE

(Bursting in)

Mama, I saw Mr. Hyde getting on the cable-car.

MAMA

I know. He leave.

CHRISTINE

Did he pay you?

MAMA

Sure, he pay me. Hundred ten dollar. . . .

NELS

Gee. . . .

MAMA

(Smiling)

Is good.

CHRISTINE

Are you going to put it in the Bank?

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

We need it right away.

(PAPA returns, staggering under an armload of books)

Mr. Hyde leaves his books, too. For you.

NELS

Say!

(PAPA stacks them on the table. NELS and CHRISTINE rush to them, reading the titles)

The Pickwick Papers, The Complete Shakespeare . . .

CHRISTINE

Alice in Wonderland, The Oxford Book of Verse . . .

NELS

The Last of the Mohicans, Ivanhoe . . .

CHRISTINE

We were right in the middle of that.

MAMA

Nels can finish it. He can read to us now in the evenings. He has fine voice, too, like Mr. Hyde.

(NELS flushes with pleasure)

Is wonderful. So much we can learn.

(She finishes the supper-making)

Christine, you take the butter back to the cooler for me, and the jelly, too.

(CHRISTINE does so)

I go up to Dagmar now.

(She lifts the tray, then pauses)

You get it, Nels?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

What? . . . Oh. . . .

(*Taking a druggist's small bottle from his pocket*)

Here.

MAMA

You put it down. After I come back, we do it. You know how?

NELS

Why, no, Mama, I . . .

MAMA

You do not ask?

NELS

No, I . . . I thought Papa . . .

MAMA

You know, Lars?

PAPA

No, I don't *know* . . . but it cannot be difficult. If you *hold* the cat . . .

MAMA

And watch him die? No! I think better you get rags . . . and a big sponge, to soak up the chloroform. You put it in the box with him, and cover him over. You get them ready out there.

NELS

Sure, Mama.

MAMA

I bring some blankets.

(*NELS goes off to the pantry, as CHRISTINE comes back. Again MAMA lifts the tray and starts for the*

I REMEMBER MAMA

*door back L. But there is a knock on the street door from AUNT JENNY, who has come to the house from down L. in a state of some excitement)*

MAMA

*(Agitated)*

So much goes on! See who it is, Christine.

CHRISTINE

*(Peeping)*

It's Aunt Jenny.

*(She opens the door)*

MAMA

Jenny. . . .

JENNY

*(Breathless)*

Marta . . . has he gone?

MAMA

Who?

JENNY

Your boarder . . . Mr. Hyde. . . .

MAMA

Yes, he has gone. Why?

JENNY

Did he pay you?

MAMA

Sure he pay me.

JENNY

How?

MAMA

He give me a check. Lars has it right there.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

*(With meaning)*

A check!

MAMA

Jenny, what is it? Christine, you give Dagmar her supper. I come soon.

*(CHRISTINE takes the tray from her and goes out back L.)*

What is it, Jenny? How do you know that Mr. Hyde has gone?

JENNY

I was at Mr. Kruper's down the street . . . you know, the restaurant and bakery, . . . and he told me Mr. Hyde was there today having his lunch, and when he left he asked if he would cash a check for him. For fifty dollars.

*(She pauses)*

PAPA

Well, go on.

JENNY

Your fine Mr. Hyde didn't expect Mr. Kruper to take it to the bank until tomorrow, but he did. And what do you think? Mr. Hyde hasn't even an *account* at that bank!

*(NELS returns and stands in the pantry doorway)*

MAMA

I don't understand.

PAPA

*(Taking the check from his pocket)*

You mean the check is no good?

I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

No good at all.

*(Triumphant)*

Your Mr. Hyde was a crook, just as I always thought he was, for all his reading and fine ways. Mr. Kruper said he'd been cashing them all over the neighborhood.

*(MAMA stands quite still, without answering)*

How much did he owe you? Plenty, I'll bet.

*(Still no answer)*

Eh? Marta, I said I bet he owed you plenty. Didn't he?

MAMA

*(Looks around, first at NELS and then down at the books on the table. She touches them)*

No. No, he owed us nothing.

*(She takes the check from PAPA, tearing it)*

Nothing.

JENNY

*(Persistently)*

How much was that check for?

*(She reaches her hand for it)*

MAMA

*(Evading her)*

It does not matter. He pay with better things than money.

*(She goes to the stove, where she throws the check, watching it burn)*

JENNY

I told you right in the beginning that you shouldn't trust him. But you were so sure . . . just like you always are. Mr. Hyde was a gentleman. A gentleman! I bet it must

## I REMEMBER MAMA

have been a hundred dollars that he rooked you of.  
Wasn't it?

MAMA

*(Returning)*

Jenny, I cannot talk now. Maybe you don't have things to do. I have.

JENNY

*(Sneeringly)*

What? What have *you* got to do that's so important?

MAMA

*(Taking up the medicine bottle)*

I have to chloroform a cat!

*(JENNY steps back in momentary alarm, almost as though MAMA were referring to her, as she goes out into the pantry with the medicine bottle, not so very unlike Lady Macbeth with the daggers)*

*(Blackout and curtains close)*

*(After a moment, the curtains part again on the kitchen, the next morning. The books have been taken off the table, and MAMA is setting the breakfast dishes, with PAPA helping her. DAGMAR comes bursting into the room, back L.)*

DAGMAR

Good morning, Mama. 'Morning, Papa. Is Uncle Elizabeth all better?

MAMA

Dagmar, there is something I must tell you.

DAGMAR

I want to see Uncle Elizabeth first.

*(She runs into the pantry. MAMA turns helplessly to PAPA)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Do something! Tell her!

PAPA

If we just let her think the cat die . . . by itself. . . .

MAMA

No. We cannot tell her lies.

(PAPA goes to the pantry door, opening it)

DAGMAR

(Heard in pantry, off)

What a funny, funny smell. Good morning, my darling, my darling Elizabeth.

(MAMA and PAPA stand stricken. DAGMAR comes in, carrying the cat, wrapped in an old shirt, with its head covered)

My goodness, you put enough blankets on him! Did you think he'd catch cold?

MAMA

(Horror-stricken)

Dagmar, you must not. . . .

(She stops at the sight of the cat, whose tail is twitching, quite obviously alive)

Dagmar, let me see . . . Let me see the cat!

(She goes over to her, and uncovers its head)

DAGMAR

(Overjoyed)

He's well. Oh, Mama, I knew you'd fix him.

MAMA

(Appalled)

But, Dagmar, I didn't. I . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

DAGMAR

(*Ignoring her*)

I'm going to take him right up and show him to Nels.

(*She runs off back L., calling*)

Nels! Nels! Uncle Elizabeth's well again!

MAMA

(*Turning to PAPA*)

Is a miracle!

PAPA

(*Shrugging*)

You cannot have used enough chloroform. You just give him good sleep, and that cures him. We rechristen the cat, Lazarus!

MAMA

But, Lars, we must tell her. Is not *good* to let her grow up believing I can fix *everything*!

PAPA

Is best thing in the world for her to believe.

(*He chuckles*)

Besides, I know *exactly* how she feels.

(*He lays his hand on hers*)

MAMA

(*Turning with embarrassment from his demonstrativeness*)

We finish getting breakfast.

(*She turns back to the table. The curtains close*)

(*Lights up down front R. KATRIN and CHRISTINE enter from the wings, in school clothes, wearing hats. CHRISTINE carries schoolbooks in a strap. KATRIN is reciting*)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

"The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes. . . ."

*(She dries up)*

". . . him that takes. It blesseth him that gives and him  
that takes. . . ."

*(She turns to CHRISTINE)*

What comes after that?

CHRISTINE

I don't know. And I don't care.

KATRIN

Why, Chris!

CHRISTINE

I don't. It's all I've heard for weeks. The school play, and  
your graduation, and going on to High. And never a  
thought of what's happening at home.

KATRIN

What do you mean?

CHRISTINE

You see—you don't even know!

KATRIN

Oh, you mean the strike?

CHRISTINE

Yes, I mean the strike. Papa hasn't worked for four  
whole weeks, and a lot you care. Why, I don't believe  
you even know what they're striking *for*. Do you? All  
you and your friends can talk about is the presents you're  
going to get. You make me ashamed of being a girl.

*Dorothy Madeline*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

(*Two girls, MADELINE and DOROTHY, come through the curtains, C., talking*)

MADELINE

(*To DOROTHY*)

Thyra Walsh's family's going to add seven pearls to the necklace they started for her when she was a baby. Oh, hello, Katrin! Did you hear about Thyra's graduation present?

KATRIN

(*Not very happily*)

Yes, I heard.

MADELINE

I'm getting an onyx ring, with a diamond in it.

KATRIN

A real diamond?

MADELINE

Yes, of course. A *small* diamond.

DOROTHY

What are *you* getting?

KATRIN

Well . . . well, they haven't actually told me, but I think . . . I think I'm going to get that pink celluloid dresser set in your father's drugstore.

DOROTHY

You mean that one in the window?

KATRIN

(*To MADELINE*)

It's got a brush and comb and mirror . . . and a hair-receiver. It's genuine celluloid!

I REMEMBER MAMA

DOROTHY

I wanted Father to give it to me, out of stock, but he said it was too expensive. Father's an awful tightwad. They're giving me a bangle.

MADELINE

Oh, there's the street-car. We've got to fly. 'By, Katrin. 'By, Christine. See you tomorrow. Come on, Dorothy.

(*The two girls rush off L.*)

CHRISTINE

Who said you were going to get the dresser set?

KATRIN

Nobody's said so . . . for certain. But I've sort of hinted, and . . .

CHRISTINE

Well, you're not going to get it.

KATRIN

How do you know?

CHRISTINE

Because I know what you *are* getting. I heard Mama tell Aunt Jenny. Aunt Jenny said you were too young to appreciate it.

KATRIN

What is it?

CHRISTINE

Mama's giving you her brooch. Her *solje*.

KATRIN

You mean that old silver thing she wears that belonged to Grandmother? What would I want an old thing like that for?

I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

It's an heirloom. Mama thinks a lot of it.

KATRIN

Well, then, she ought to keep it. You don't really mean that's *all* they're going to give me?

CHRISTINE

What more do you want?

KATRIN

I want the dresser set. My goodness, if Mama doesn't realize what's a suitable present . . . why, it's practically the most important time in a girl's life, when she graduates.

CHRISTINE

And you say you're not selfish!

KATRIN

It's not selfishness.

CHRISTINE

Well, I don't know what else you'd call it. With Papa not working, we need every penny we can lay our hands on. Even the Little Bank's empty. But you'll devil Mama into giving you the dresser set somehow. So why talk about it? I'm going home.

*(She turns and goes up the steps and through the curtains)*

*(KATRIN stands alone with a set and stubborn mouth, and then sits on the steps)*

KATRIN

Christine was right. I got the dresser set. They gave it to me just before supper on graduation night. Papa could not attend the exercises because there was a strike meet-

## I REMEMBER MAMA

ing to decide about going back to work. I was so excited that night, I could hardly eat, and the present took the last remnants of my appetite clean away.

*(The curtains part on the kitchen. PAPA, MAMA, and DAGMAR at table, with coffee. CHRISTINE is clearing dishes)*

CHRISTINE

' I'll just stack the dishes now, Mama. We'll wash them when we come home.

*(She carries them into the pantry)*

PAPA

*(Holding up a cube of sugar)*

Who wants coffee-sugar?

*(He dips it in his coffee)*

Dagmar?

*(He hands it to her)*

Katrin?

*(She rises from the step, coming into the scene for the sugar)*

MAMA

You get your coat, Katrin; you need it.

*(KATRIN goes out back L.)*

DAGMAR

Aunt Jenny says if we drank black coffee like you do at our age, it would turn our complexions dark. I'd like to be a black Norwegian. Like Uncle Chris. Can I, Papa?

PAPA

I like you better blonde. Like Mama.

DAGMAR

When do you get old enough for your complexion *not* to turn dark? When can we drink coffee?

I REMEMBER MAMA

PAPA

One day, when you are grown up.

(JENNY and TRINA have come to the street door L.  
JENNY knocks)

MAMA

There are Jenny and Trina.

(She goes to the door)

Is good. We can start now.

(She opens the door. JENNY and TRINA come in)

JENNY

Well, are you all ready? Is Katrin very excited?

PAPA

(Nodding)

She ate no supper.

(MAMA has started to put on her hat, and to put on Dagmar's hat and coat for her. CHRISTINE comes back from the pantry. PAPA gives her a dipped cube of sugar)

JENNY

Is that black coffee you dipped that sugar in? Lars, you shouldn't. It's not good for them. It'll . . .

PAPA

(Finishing for her)

Turn their complexions black. I know. Well, maybe it is all right if we have one colored daughter.

JENNY

Lars, really!

(KATRIN returns with her coat)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

Aunt Jenny, did you see my graduation present?

*(She gets it from a chair. CHRISTINE gives her a disgusted look, and goes out back L. KATRIN displays the dresser set)*

Look! It's got a hair-receiver.

JENNY

But I thought . . . Marta, I thought you were going to give her . . .

MAMA

No, you were right, Jenny. She is too young to appreciate that. She like something more gay . . . more modern.

JENNY

H'm. Well, it's very pretty, I suppose, but . . .

*(She looks up as MAMA puts on her coat)*

You're not wearing your solje!

MAMA

*(Quickly)*

No. I do not wear it tonight. Come, Trina, we shall be late.

TRINA

Oh, but Peter isn't here yet.

MAMA

Katrin has her costume to put on. He can follow. Or do you like to wait for Peter?

TRINA

I think . . . if you don't mind . . .

MAMA

You can stay with Lars. He does not have to go yet.

I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

I hope Katrin knows her part.

PAPA

Sure she knows it. I know it, too.

TRINA

It's too bad he can't see Katrin's debut as an actress.

MAMA

You will be back before us, Lars?

PAPA

(*Nodding*)

I think the meeting will not last long.

MAMA

Is good. We go now.

(*She goes out with JENNY and DAGMAR. CHRISTINE and NELS return from back L., and follow, waiting outside for KATRIN, while the others go ahead. KATRIN puts on her hat and coat and picks up the dresser set*)

PAPA

(*To TRINA*)

You like we play a game of checkers while we wait?

TRINA

Oh, I haven't played checkers in years.

PAPA

Then I beat you.

(*He rises to get the checker set. KATRIN kisses him*)

KATRIN

Good-by, Papa.

I REMEMBER MAMA

PAPA

Good-by, daughter. I think of you.

KATRIN

I'll see you there, Aunt Trina.

TRINA

Good luck!

PAPA

I get the checkers.

(KATRIN goes out L., PAPA gets the checker set from a cupboard under the dresser, brings it to the table and sets it up during the ensuing scene, which is played outside in the street)

CHRISTINE

(Contemptuously)

Oh, bringing your cheap trash with you to show off?

KATRIN

It's not trash. It's beautiful. You're just jealous.

CHRISTINE

I told you you'd devil Mama into giving it to you.

KATRIN

I didn't. I didn't devil her at all. I just showed it to her in Mr. Schiller's window. . . .

CHRISTINE

And made her go and sell her brooch that her very own mother gave her.

KATRIN

What?

I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

Chris . . . you weren't supposed to tell that!

CHRISTINE

I don't care. I think she ought to know.

KATRIN

Is that true? Did Mama—Nels—?

NELS

Well, yes, as a matter of fact, she did. Now, come on.

KATRIN

No, no, I don't believe it. I'm going to ask Papa.

NELS

You haven't time.

KATRIN

I don't care.

*(She rushes back to the house and dashes into the kitchen. CHRISTINE goes off down L., NELS follows her)*

Papa—Papa—Christine says— Papa, did Mama sell her brooch to give me this?

PAPA

Christine should not have told you that.

KATRIN

It's true, then?

PAPA

*Cetera*  
She did not sell it. She traded it to Mr. Schiller for your present.

KATRIN

*(Near tears)*

Oh, but she shouldn't. . . . I never meant . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

PAPA

Look, Katrin. You wanted the present. Mama wanted your happiness; she wanted it more than she wanted the brooch.

KATRIN

But I never meant her to do *that*.

(*Crying*)

She *loved* it so. It was all she had of Grandmother's.

PAPA

She always meant it for you, Katrin. And you must not cry. You have your play to act.

KATRIN

(*Sobbing*)

I don't want to act in it now.

PAPA

But you must. Your audience is waiting.

KATRIN

(*As before*)

I don't care.

PAPA

But you must care. Tonight you are not Katrin any longer. You are an actress. And an actress must act, whatever she is feeling. There is a saying—what is it—

TRINA

(*Brightly*)

The mails must go through!

PAPA

No, no. The show must go on. So you stop crying, and go and act your play. We talk of this later. Afterwards.

I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

(Pulling herself together)

All right. I'll go.

(Sniffing a good deal, she picks up the dresser set and goes back to the street and off down L. PAPA and TRINA exchange glances, and then settle down to their checkers)

PAPA

Now we play.

(The lights fade and the curtains close)

(Spot up on stage R. turntable. The two girls from the earlier scene are dressing in costumes for "The Merchant of Venice" before a plank dressing table)

DOROTHY

I'm getting worried about Katrin. If anything's happened to her . . .

MADELINE

(Pulling up her tights)

I'll forget my lines. I know I will. I'll look out and see Miss Forrester sitting there, and forget every single line.

(KATRIN rushes in from the L. She carries the dresser set, places it on the dressing table)

We thought you'd had an accident, or something. . . .

KATRIN

Dorothy, is your father here tonight?

DOROTHY

He's going to be. Why?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

I want to speak to him.

*(As she pulls off her hat and coat)*

Will you tell him . . . please . . . not to go away without speaking to me? After. After the exercises.

DOROTHY

What on earth do you want to speak to Father for?

KATRIN

I've got something to say to him. Something to ask him. It's important. *Very* important.

MADELINE

Is that the dresser set?

*(Picking it up)*

Can I look at it a minute?

KATRIN

*(Snatching it from her, violently)*

No!

MADELINE

Why, what's the matter? I only wanted to look at it.

KATRIN

*(Emotionally)*

You can't. You're not to touch it. Dorothy, you take it and put it where I can't see it.

*(She thrusts it at her)*

Go on. . . . Take it! Take it! Take it!!

*(Blackout)*

*(Curtains part on the kitchen. MAMA and PAPA in conclave at the table with cups of coffee)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

I am worried about her, Lars. When it was over, I see her talking with Mr. Schiller—and then she goes to take off her costume and Nels tells me that he will bring her home. But it is long time, and is late for her to be out. And in the play, Lars, she was not good. I have heard her practice it here, and she was good, but tonight, no. It was as if . . . as if she was thinking of something else all the time.

PAPA

I think maybe she was.

MAMA

But what? What can be worrying her?

PAPA

Marta . . . tonight, after you leave, Katrin found out about your brooch.

MAMA

My brooch? But how? Who told her?

PAPA

Christine.

MAMA

(*Angry*)

Why?

PAPA

I do not know.

MAMA

(*Rising with a sternness we have not seen before, and calling*)

Christine! Christine!

## I REMEMBER MAMA

CHRISTINE

(*Emerging from the pantry, wiping a dish*)

Were you calling me, Mama?

MAMA

Yes. Christine, did you tell Katrin tonight about my brooch?

CHRISTINE

(*Frightened, but firm*)

Yes.

MAMA

Why did you?

CHRISTINE

Because I hated the smug way she was acting over that dresser set.

MAMA

Is no excuse. You make her unhappy. You make her not good in the play.

CHRISTINE

Well, she made *you* unhappy, giving up your brooch for her selfishness.

MAMA

Is not your business. I choose to give my brooch. Is not for you to judge. And you know I do not want you to tell. I am angry with you, Christine.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry. But I'm not sorry I told.

(*She goes back to the pantry with a set, obstinate face*)

PAPA

Christine is the stubborn one.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

(NELS and KATRIN have approached the house outside L. They stop and look at each other in the lamplight. KATRIN looks scared. Then NELS pats her, and she goes in, NELS following. MAMA looks up inquiringly and searchingly into Katrin's face. KATRIN turns away, taking off her hat and coat, and taking something from her pocket)

NELS

What happened at the meeting, Papa?

PAPA

We go back to work tomorrow.

NELS

Gee, that's bully. Isn't it, Mama?

MAMA

(Absentely)

Yes, is good.

KATRIN

(Coming to MAMA)

Mama . . . here's your brooch.

(She gives it to her)

I'm sorry I was so bad in the play. I'll go and help Christine with the dishes.

(She turns and goes into the pantry)

MAMA

(Unwrapping the brooch from tissue paper)

Mr. Schiller give it back to her?

NELS

We went to his house to get it. He didn't want to. He was planning to give it to his wife for her birthday. But Katrin begged and begged him. She even offered to go

I REMEMBER MAMA

and work in his store during her vacation if he'd give it back.

PAPA

*(Impressed)*

So? So!

MAMA

And what did Mr. Schiller say?

NELS

He said that wasn't necessary. But he gave her a job all the same. She's going to work for him, afternoons, for three dollars a week.

MAMA

And the dresser set—she gave that back?

NELS

Yes. She was awful upset, Mama. It was kinda hard for her to do. She's a good kid. Well, I'll say good night. I've got to be up early.

PAPA

Good night, Nels.

NELS

Good night, Papa.

*(He goes out back L.)*

MAMA

Good night, Nels.

PAPA

Nels is the kind one.

*(He starts to re-fill Mama's coffee cup. She stops him, putting her hand over her cup)*

No?

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

(Rising, crossing R. and calling)  
Katrín! Katrín!

KATRIN

(Coming to the pantry door)  
Yes, Mama?

MAMA

Come here.

(KATRIN comes to her. MAMA holds out the  
brooch)

You put this on.

KATRIN

No . . . it's yours.

MAMA

It is your graduation present. I put it on for you.  
(She pins the brooch on Katrin's dress)

KATRIN

(Near tears)  
I'll wear it always. I'll keep it forever.

MAMA

Christine should not have told you.

KATRIN

I'm glad she did. Now.

PAPA

And I am glad, too.  
(He dips a lump of sugar and holds it out to her)  
Katrín?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

*(Tearful again, shakes her head)*

I'm sorry, Papa. I . . . I don't feel like it.

*(She moves away and sits on the chest under the window, with her back to the room)*

PAPA

So? So?

*(He goes to the dresser)*

MAMA

What you want, Lars?

*(He does not answer, but takes a cup and saucer, comes to the table and pours a cup of coffee, indicating KATRIN with his head. MAMA nods, pleased, then checks his pouring and fills up the cup from the cream pitcher which she empties in so doing. PAPA puts in sugar, and moves to KATRIN)*

PAPA

Katrin.

*(She turns. He holds out the cup)*

KATRIN

*(Incredulous)*

For me?

PAPA

For our grown-up daughter.

*(MAMA nods. KATRIN takes the cup, lifts it—then her emotion overcomes her. She thrusts it at PAPA and rushes from the room)*

PAPA

Katrin is the dramatic one! Is too bad. Her first cup of coffee, and she does not drink it.

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

It would not have been good for her, so late at night.

PAPA

*(Smiling)*

And you, Marta, you are the practical one.

MAMA

You drink the coffee, Lars. We do not want to waste it.

*(She pushes it across to him)*

*(Lights dim. Curtains close)*

*(Lights up on L. turntable, representing the parlor of Jenny's house. A telephone on a table, at which TRINA is discovered, talking)*

TRINA

*(Into phone)*

Yes, Peter. Yes, Peter. I know, Peter, but we don't know where he is. It's so long since we heard from him. He's sure to turn up soon. Yes, I know, Peter. I know, but . . .

*(Subsiding obediently)*

Yes, Peter. Yes, Peter.

*(Sentimentally)*

Oh, Peter, you know I do. Good-by, Peter.

*(She hangs up, and turns, to see JENNY, who has come in behind her, eating a piece of toast and jam)*

JENNY

What was all that about?

TRINA

Peter says we shouldn't wait any longer to hear from Uncle Chris. He says we should send the wedding invitations out right away. He was quite insistent about it.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

Peter can be very masterful, sometimes . . . when he's alone with me!

*(The telephone rings again. JENNY answers it, putting down the toast, which TRINA takes up and nibbles at during the scene)*

JENNY

This is Mrs. Stenborg's boarding house. Mrs. Stenborg speaking. Oh, yes, Marta . . . what is it?

*(She listens)*

*(Spot up on R. turntable, disclosing MAMA standing at a wall telephone booth. She wears hat and coat, and has an opened telegram in her hand)*

MAMA

Jenny, is Uncle Chris. I have a telegram. It says if we want to see him again we should come without delay.

JENNY

Where is he?

MAMA

*(Consulting the telegram)*

It comes from a place called Ukiah. Nels says it is up north from San Francisco.

JENNY

Who is the telegram from?

MAMA

It does not say.

JENNY

That . . . woman?

MAMA

I don't know, Jenny. I think maybe.

I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

I won't go.

(SIGRID comes in through the curtains C., dressed in hat and coat, carrying string marketing bags, full of vegetables. JENNY speaks to her, whisperingly, aside)

It's Uncle Chris. Marta says he's dying.

(Then, back into phone)

Why was the telegram sent to *you*? I'm the eldest.

MAMA

Jenny, is not the time to think of who is eldest. Uncle Chris is dying.

JENNY

I don't believe it. He's too mean to die. Ever.

(NELS comes to booth from wings, R., and hands MAMA a slip of paper)

I'm not going.

MAMA

Jenny, I cannot stop to argue. There is a train at eleven o'clock. It takes four hours. You call Sigrid.

JENNY

Sigrid is here now.

MAMA

Good. Then you tell her.

JENNY

What do you say the name of the place is?

MAMA

Ukiah.

(Spelling in Norwegian)

U.K.I.A.H.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

I won't go.

MAMA

That *you* decide.

*(She hangs up. Her spot goes out)*

SIGRID

Uncle Chris dying!

JENNY

The wages of sin.

TRINA

Oh, he's old. Maybe it is time for him to go.

JENNY

Four hours by train, and maybe have to stay all night.  
All that expense to watch a wicked old man die of the  
D.T.'s.

SIGRID

I know, but . . . there is his will. . . .

JENNY

Huh, even supposing he's anything to leave—you know  
who he'd leave it *to*, don't you?

SIGRID

Yes. But all the same, he's dying now, and blood is  
thicker than water. Especially when it's Norwegian. I'm  
going. I shall take Arne with me. Uncle Chris was always  
fond of children.

TRINA

I agree with Sigrid. I think we *should* go.

JENNY

Well, *you* can't go, anyway.

I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

Why not?

JENNY

Because of that woman. You can't meet a woman like that.

TRINA

Why not? If you two can . . .

SIGRID

We're married women.

TRINA

I'm engaged!

JENNY

That's not the same thing.

SIGRID

Not the same thing at all!

TRINA

Nonsense. I've never met a woman like that. Maybe I'll never get another chance. Besides, if he's going to change his will, there's still my dowry, remember. Do you think we should take Peter?

JENNY

Peter Thorkelson? Whatever for?

TRINA

Well, after all, I mean . . . I mean, his profession . . .

JENNY

Trina, you always were a fool. Anyone would know the last person a dying man wants to see is an undertaker!

*(Blackout) (Turntable revolves out)*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*(Spot up on KATRIN, standing down front, R.C.  
She wears her school-girl hat)*

KATRIN

When Mama said I was to go with her, I was excited and I was frightened. It was exciting to take sandwiches for the train, almost as though we were going on a picnic. But I was scared at the idea of seeing death, though I told myself that if I was going to be a writer, I had to experience everything. But all the same, I hoped it would be all over when we got there.

*(She starts to walk toward C. and up the steps)*

It was afternoon when we arrived. We asked at the station for the Halvorsen ranch, and it seemed to me that the man looked at us strangely. Uncle Chris was obviously considered an odd character. The ranch was about three miles from the town; a derelict, rambling old place. There was long grass, and tall trees, and a smell of honeysuckle. We made quite a cavalcade, walking up from the gate.

*(The procession comes in from the R., behind  
KATRIN. MAMA, JENNY, TRINA, SIGRID, and ARNE)*

The woman came out on the steps to meet us.

*(The procession starts towards the C., moving upwards. The WOMAN comes through the curtains, down one step. The AUNTS freeze in their tracks.  
MAMA goes forward to her)*

MAMA

How is he? Is he—?

WOMAN

*(With grave self-possession)*

Come in, won't you?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

(She holds the curtains slightly aside. MAMA goes in. KATRIN follows, looking curiously at the WOMAN. The AUNTS walk stiffly past her, SIGRID clutching ARNE and shielding him from contact with the WOMAN. They disappear behind the curtains. The WOMAN stands a moment, looking off into the distance. Then she goes in behind the curtains, too)

(The curtains draw apart, revealing Uncle Chris' bedroom. It is simple, and shabby. The door to the room is at the back, L. In the L. wall is a window, with curtains, drawn aside now. In front of it, a wash-stand. The afternoon sunlight comes through the window, falling onto the big double bed, in which UNCLE CHRIS is propped up on pillows. Beside him, R., on a small table is a pitcher of water. He has a glass in his hand. MAMA stands to the R. of him: JENNY to the L. The others are ranged below the window. The WOMAN is not present)

UNCLE CHRIS

(Hanging MAMA the empty glass)

I want more. You give me more. Is still some in the bottle.

MAMA

Uncle Chris, that will not help now.

UNCLE CHRIS

It always help.

(With a glance at JENNY)

Now especially.

JENNY

(Firmly)

Uncle Chris, I don't think you realize . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

What I don't realize? That I am dying? Why else do I think you come here? Why else do I think you stand there, watching me?

*(He sits upright)*

Get out. Get out. I don't want you here. Get out!

JENNY

Oh, very well. Very well. We'll be outside on the porch, if you want us.

*(She starts towards the door)*

UNCLE CHRIS

That is where I want you—on the porch!

*(JENNY goes out. TRINA follows. SIGRID is about to go, too, when UNCLE CHRIS stops her)*

Wait. That is Arne. Come here, Arne.

*(ARNE, propelled by SIGRID, advances toward the bed)*

How is your knee?

ARNE

It's fine, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

Not hurt any more? You don't use swear words any more?

ARNE

N-no, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

You walk goot? Quite goot? Let me see you walk. Walk around the room.

*(ARNE does so)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

Fast. Fast. Run! Run!

(ARNE *does so*)

Is goot.

SIGRID

(*Encouraged and advancing*)

Uncle Chris, Arne has always been so fond of you. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

(*Shouting*)

I tell you all to get out. Except Marta.

(*As KATRIN edges with the AUNTS to the door*)

And Katrinë. Katrinë and I haf secret. You remember, Katrinë?

KATRIN

Yes, Uncle Chris.

MAMA

Uncle Chris, you must lie down again.

UNCLE CHRIS

Then you give me drink.

MAMA

No, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

We cannot waste what is left in the bottle. You do not drink it . . . who will drink it when I am gone? What harm can it do . . . now? I die, anyway. . . . You give it to me.

(MAMA *goes to the wash-stand, pours him a drink of whiskey and water, and takes it to him, sitting on the bed beside him. He drinks, then turns together, leaning back against her arm and the pillows*)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

Marta, I haf never made a will. Was never enough money. But you sell this ranch. It will not bring much. I have not had it long enough. And there is mortgage. Big mortgage. But it leave a little. Maybe two, tree hundred dollars. You give to Yessie.

MAMA

Yessie?

UNCLE CHRIS

Yessie Brown. My housekeeper. No, why I call her that to you? You understand. She is my woman. Twelve years she has been my woman. My wife, only I cannot marry her. She has husband alive somewhere. She was trained nurse, but she get sick and I bring her to the country to get well again. There will be no money for *you*, Marta. Always I wanted there should be money to make Nils doctor. But there were other things . . . quick things. And now there is no time to make more. There is no money, but you make Nils doctor, all the same. You like?

MAMA

Sure, Uncle Chris. It is what Lars and I have always wanted for him. To help people who suffer. . . .

UNCLE CHRIS

Is the greatest thing in the world. It is to have a little of God in *you*. Always I wanted to be doctor myself. Is the only thing I have ever wanted. Nils must do it for me.

MAMA

He will, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

Is goot.

*(He strokes her hand)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

You are the goot one. I am glad you come, *Lille Ven.*

(*He moves his head restlessly*)

Where is Yessie?

MAMA

I think she wait outside.

UNCLE CHRIS

You do not mind if she is here?

MAMA

Of course not, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

You call her. I like you both be here.

(MAMA goes, with a quick glance at KATRIN. UNCLE CHRIS signs to KATRIN to come closer. She sits on the chair beside the bed)

Katrinë, your Mama write me you drink coffee now?

(She nods. He looks at her affectionately)

Katrinë, who will be writer. . . . You are not frightened of me now?

KATRIN

No, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

One day maybe you write story about Uncle Chris. If you remember.

KATRIN

(Whispering)

I'll remember.

(MAMA returns with the WOMAN. They come to the side of his bed)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

UNCLE CHRIS

*(Obviously exhausted and in pain)*

I like you both stay with me . . . now. I think best now  
maybe Katrinë go away. Good-by, Katrinë.

*(Then he repeats it in Norwegian)*

Farvell, Katrinë.

KATRIN

Good-by, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

You say it in Norwegian, like I do.

KATRIN

*(In Norwegian)*

Farvell, Onkel Chris.

*(She slips out, in tears)*

UNCLE CHRIS

Yessie! Maybe I should introduce you to each other.  
Yessie, this is my niece, Marta. The only von of my  
nieces I can stand. Marta, this is Yessie, who have give me  
much happiness. . . .

*(The two women shake hands)*

MAMA

I am very glad to meet you.

JESSIE

I am, too.

UNCLE CHRIS

*(As they shake)*

Is goot. And now you give me von more drink. You have  
drink with me . . . both of you. That way we finish the  
bottle. Yes?

*(JESSIE and MAMA look at each other)*

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Sure, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

Goot. Yessie, you get best glasses.

(With a chuckle to MAMA)

Yessie does not like to drink, but this is special occasion.

(JESSIE gets three glasses from a wall shelf)

What is the time?

MAMA

It is about half past four, Uncle Chris.

UNCLE CHRIS

The sun come around this side the house in afternoon. You draw the curtain a little maybe. Is strong for my eyes.

(MAMA goes over and draws the curtain over the window. The stage darkens. JESSIE pours three drinks, filling two of the glasses with water. She is about to put water in the third when UNCLE CHRIS stops her)

No, no, I take it now without water. Always the last drink without water. Is Norwegian custom.

(To MAMA, with a smile)

True?

(JESSIE sits on the bed beside him, about to feed his drink to him, but he pushes her aside)

No. No, I do not need you feed it to me. I can drink myself.

(He takes the glass from her)

Give Marta her glass.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

(JESSIE hands a glass to MAMA. The two women stand on either side of the bed, holding their glasses)

So. . . . Skoal!

JESSIE

(Clinking glasses with him)

Skoal.

MAMA

(Doing likewise)

Skoal.

(They all three drink. Slow dim to blackout. Curtains close)

(Spot up on R. turntable. A porch with a bench, and a chair, on which the three AUNTS are sitting. JENNY is dozing)

SIGRID

(Flicking her handkerchief)

These gnats are awful. I'm being simply eaten alive.

TRINA

Gnats are always worse around sunset.

(She catches one)

JENNY

(Rousing herself)

I should never have let you talk me into coming. To be insulted like that . . . turned out of his room . . . and then expected to sit here hour after hour without as much as a cup of coffee. . . .

SIGRID

I'd make coffee if I knew where the kitchen was.

I REMEMBER MAMA

JENNY

*Her kitchen? It would poison me.*

*(Rising)*

No, I'm going home. Are you coming, Trina?

TRINA

Oh, I think we ought to wait a little longer. After all, you can't *hurry* these things. . . . I mean . . .

*(She breaks off in confusion at what she has said)*

JENNY

*(To SIGRID)*

And all your talk about his will. A lot of chance we got to say a word!

TRINA

Maybe Marta's been talking to him.

*(MAMA comes from between the curtains C.)*

JENNY

Well?

MAMA

Uncle Chris has . . . gone.

*(There is a silence)*

JENNY

*(More gently than is her wont)*

Did he . . . say anything about a will?

MAMA

There is no will.

*,*

JENNY

Well, then, that means . . . we're his nearest relatives. . . .

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

There is no money, either.

SIGRID

How do you know?

MAMA

He told me.

*(She brings out a small notebook that she is carrying)*

JENNY

What's that?

MAMA

Is an account of how he spent the money.

JENNY

Bills from a liquor store.

MAMA

No, Jenny. No. I read it to you.

*(JENNY sits again)*

You know how Uncle Chris was lame . . . how he walked always with limp. It was his one thought . . . lame people. He would have liked to be doctor and help them. Instead, he help them other ways. I read you the last page. . . .

*(She reads from the notebook)*

“Joseph Spinelli. Four years old. Tubercular left leg. Three hundred thirty-seven dollars, eighteen cents.”

*(Pause)*

“Walks now. Esta Jensen. Nine years. Club-foot. Two hundred seventeen dollars, fifty cents. Walks now.”

*(Then, reading very slowly)*

“Arne Solfeldt. . . .”

I REMEMBER MAMA

SIGRID

(*Startled*)

My Arne?

MAMA

(*Reading on*)

“Nine years. Fractured kneecap. Four hundred forty-two dollars, sixteen cents.”

(*KATRIN and ARNE come running in from the L. across the stage*)

ARNE

(*Calling as he comes running across*)

Mother . . . Mother . . . Are we going to eat soon?

(*He stops, awed by the solemnity of the group, and by MAMA, who puts out her hand gently, to silence him*)

What is it? Is Uncle Chris . . .?

MAMA

(*To the AUNTS*)

It does not tell the end about Arne. I like to write “Walks now.” Yes?

SIGRID

(*Very subdued*)

Yes.

MAMA

(*Taking a pencil from the book*)

Maybe even . . . “runs”?

(*SIGRID nods, moist-eyed. TRINA is crying. MAMA writes in the book, and then closes it*)

So. Is finished. Is all.

I REMEMBER MAMA

(*She touches JENNY on the shoulder*)

It was good.

JENNY

(*After a gulping moment*)

I go and make some coffee.

(*The woman, JESSIE, appears from between the curtains on the steps*)

JESSIE

You can go in and see him now if you want.

(*JENNY looks back, half-hesitant at the others. Then she nods and goes in. TRINA follows her, mopping her eyes. SIGRID puts her arm suddenly around ARNE in a spasm of maternal affection, and they, too, go in. MAMA, KATRIN, and JESSIE are left alone*)

I'm moving down to the hotel for tonight . . . so that you can all stay.

(*She is about to go back, when MAMA stops her*)

MAMA

Wait. What will you do now . . . after he is buried? You have money?

(*JESSIE shakes her head*)

Where you live?

JESSIE

I'll find a room somewhere. I'll probably go back to nursing.

MAMA

You like to come to San Francisco for a little? To our house? We have room. Plenty room.

I REMEMBER MAMA

JESSIE

(*Touched, moving to MAMA*)

That's very kind of you, but . . .

MAMA

I like to have you. You come for a little as our guest.  
When you get work you can be our boarder.

JESSIE

(*Awkwardly grateful*)

I don't know why you should bother. . . .

MAMA

(*Touching her*)

You were good to Uncle Chris.

(*JESSIE grasps her hand, deeply moved, then turns and goes quickly back through the curtains. MAMA turns to KATRIN*)

Katrin, you come and see him?

KATRIN

(*Scared*)

See him? You mean . . .

MAMA

I like you see him. You need not be frightened. He looks . . . happy and at peace. I like you to know what death looks like. Then you are not frightened of it, ever.

KATRIN

Will you come with me?

MAMA

Sure.

(*She stretches out her hand, puts her arm around her, and then leads her gently in through the curtains*)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*(Spot up on L. turntable, representing a park bench against a hedge. TRINA, and MR. THORKELSON, in outdoor clothes, are seated together. TRINA is cooing over a baby-carriage)*

TRINA

Who's the most beautiful Norwegian baby in San Francisco? Who's going to be three months old tomorrow? Little Christopher Thorkelson!

*(To MR. THORKELSON)*

Do you know, Peter, I think he's even beginning to *look* a little like Uncle Chris! Quite apart from his black curls—and those, of course, he gets from *you*.

*(To baby again)*

He's going to grow up to be a black Norwegian, isn't he, just like his daddy and his Uncle Chris?

*(Settling down beside MR. THORKELSON)*

I think there's something about his mouth . . . a sort of . . . well . . . *firmness*. Of course, it's *your* mouth, too. But then I've always thought you had quite a lot of Uncle Chris about you.

*(She looks back at the baby)*

Look—he's asleep!

MR. THORKELSON

Trina, do you know what next Thursday is?

TRINA

*(Nodding, smiling)*

Our anniversary.

MR. THORKELSON

What would you think of our giving a little party?

TRINA

A party?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MR. THORKELSON

Oh, quite a modest one. Nothing showy or ostentatious—but, after all, we have been married a year, and with your having been in mourning and the baby coming so soon and everything, we've not been able to entertain. I think it's time you . . . took your place in society.

TRINA

*(Scared)*

What . . . sort of a party?

MR. THORKELSON

An evening party.

*(Proudly)*

A soirée! I should say about ten people . . . some of the Norwegian colony . . . and Lars and Marta, of course. . . .

TRINA

*(Beginning to count on her fingers)*

And Jenny and Sigrid. . . .

MR. THORKELSON

Oh . . . I . . . I hadn't thought of asking Jenny and Sigrid.

TRINA

Oh, we'd have to. We couldn't leave them out.

MR. THORKELSON

Trina, I hope you won't be offended if I say that I have never really felt . . . well, altogether comfortable with Jenny and Sigrid. They have always made me feel that they didn't think I was . . . well . . . *worthy* of you. Of course, I know I'm not, but . . . well . . . one doesn't like to be reminded of it . . . *all* the time.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

TRINA

(*Taking his hand*)

Oh, Peter.

MR. THORKELSON

But you're quite right. We must ask them. Now, as to the matter of refreshments . . . what would you suggest?

TRINA

(*Flustered*)

Oh, I don't know. I . . . what would you say to . . . ice cream and cookies for the ladies . . . and coffee, of course . . . and . . . perhaps port wine for the gentlemen?

MR. THORKELSON

(*Anxiously*)

Port wine?

TRINA

Just a little. You could bring it in already poured out, in *little* glasses. Jenny and Sigrid can help me serve the ice cream.

MR. THORKELSON

(*Firmly*)

No. If Jenny and Sigrid come, they come as guests, like everyone else. You shall have someone in to help you in the kitchen.

TRINA

You mean a waitress?

(MR. THORKELSON *nods, beaming*)

Oh, but none of us have *ever* . . . do you really think

I REMEMBER MAMA

. . . I mean . . . you did say we shouldn't be ostentatious. . . .

MR. THORKELSON

(*Nervously*)

Trina, there's something I would like to say. I've never been very good at expressing myself or my . . . well . . . *deeper* feelings—but I want you to know that I'm not only very fond of you, but very . . . well . . . very *proud* of you as well, and I want you to have the best of everything, as far as it's in my power to give it to you.

(*As a climax*)

I want you to have a waitress!

TRINA

(*Overcome*)

Yes, Peter.

(*They hold hands*)

(*The lights fade and the turntable revolves out*)

(*Curtains part on kitchen, slightly changed, smartened and refurnished now. MAMA and PAPA seated as usual. DAGMAR, looking a little older, is seated on the chest, reading a solid-looking book. NELS enters from back L. door, carrying a newspaper. He wears long trousers now, and looks about seventeen*)

NELS

Hello! Here's your evening paper, Papa.

(*PAPA puts down the morning paper he is reading, and takes the evening one from NELS*)

PAPA

Is there any news?

I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

No.

*(He takes out a package of cigarettes with elaborate unconcern. MAMA watches with disapproval. Then, as he is about to light his cigarette, he stops, remembering something)*

Oh, I forgot. There's a letter for Katrin. I picked it up on the mat as I came in.

*(Going to door back L., and calling)*

Katrin! Katrin! There's a letter for you.

KATRIN

*(Answering from off stage)*

Coming!

MAMA

Nels, you know who the letter is from?

NELS

Why, no, Mama.

*(Hands it to her)*

It looks like her own handwriting.

MAMA

*(Gravely inspecting it)*

Is bad.

PAPA

Why is bad?

MAMA

She get too many like that. I think they are stories she send to the magazines.

DAGMAR

*(Closing her book loudly, rising)*

Well, I'll go and see if I have any puppies yet. Mama, I've just decided something.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

What have you decided?

DAGMAR

If Nels is going to be a doctor, when I grow up, I'm going to be a—

*(Looking at the book-title, and stumbling over the word)*

vet-vet-veterinarian.

MAMA

And what is that?

DAGMAR

A doctor for animals.

MAMA

Is good. Is good.

DAGMAR

There are far more animals in the world than there are human beings, and far more human doctors than animal ones. It isn't fair.

*(She goes to the pantry door)*

I suppose we couldn't have a horse, could we?

*(This only produces a concerted laugh from the family. She turns, sadly)*

No. . . . I was afraid we couldn't.

*(She goes into the pantry. KATRIN comes in, back L. She wears a slightly more adult dress than before. Her hair is up and she looks about eighteen)*

KATRIN

Where's the letter?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

*(Handing it to her)*

Here.

*(KATRIN takes it, nervously. She looks at the envelope, and her face falls. She opens it, pulls out a manuscript and a rejection slip, looks at it a moment, and then replaces both in the envelope. The others watch her covertly. Then she looks up, with determination)*

KATRIN

Mama . . . Papa . . . I want to say something.

PAPA

What is it?

KATRIN

I'm not going to go to college.

PAPA

Why not?

KATRIN

Because it would be a waste of time and money. The only point in my going to college was to be a writer. Well, I'm not going to be one, so . . .

MAMA

Katrin, is it your letter that makes you say this? It is a story come back again?

KATRIN

Again is right. This is the tenth time. I made this one a test. It's the best I've ever written, or ever shall write. I know that. Well, it's no good.

NELS

What kind of a story is it?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

Oh . . . it's a story about a painter, who's a genius, and he goes blind.

NELS

Sounds like "The Light That Failed."

KATRIN

Well, what's wrong with that?

NELS

*(Quickly)*

Nothing. Nothing!

KATRIN

Besides, it's not like that. My painter gets better. He has an operation and recovers his sight, and paints better than ever before.

MAMA

Is good.

KATRIN

*(Bitterly unhappy)*

No, it isn't. It's rotten. But it's the best I can do.

MAMA

You have asked your teachers about this?

KATRIN

Teachers don't know anything about writing. They just know about literature.

MAMA

If there was someone we could ask . . . for advice . . . to tell us . . . tell us if your stories are good.

KATRIN

Yes. Well, there isn't. And they're *not*.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

PAPA

*(Looking at the evening paper)*

There is something here in the paper about a lady writer.  
I just noticed the headline. Wait.

*(He looks back for it and reads)*

“Woman writer tells key to literary success.”

KATRIN

Who?

PAPA

A lady called Florence Dana Moorhead. It gives her picture. A fat lady. You have heard of her?

KATRIN

Yes, of course. Everyone has. She's terribly successful.  
She's here on a lecture tour.

MAMA

What does she say is the secret?

PAPA

You read it, Katrin.

*(He hands her the paper)*

KATRIN

*(Gabbling the first part)*

“Florence Dana Moorhead, celebrated novelist and short story writer . . . blah-blah-blah . . . interviewed today in her suite at the Fairmont . . . blah-blah-blah . . . pronounced sincerity the one essential quality for success as a writer.”

*(Throwing aside the paper)*

A lot of help that is.

MAMA

Katrin, this lady . . . maybe if you sent her your stories, she could tell you what is wrong with them?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

(*Wearily*)

Oh, Mama, don't be silly.

MAMA

Why is silly?

KATRIN

Well, in the first place because she's a very important person . . . a celebrity . . . and she'd never read them. And in the second, because . . . you seem to think writing's like . . . well, like cooking, or something. That all you have to have is the recipe. It takes a lot more than that. You have to have a gift for it.

MAMA

You have to have a gift for cooking, too. But there are things you can learn, if you have the gift.

KATRIN

Well, that's the whole point. I haven't. I *know* . . . now. So, if you've finished with the morning paper, Papa, I'll take the want ad. section, and see if I can find myself a job.

(*She takes the morning paper and goes out R.*)

MAMA

Is bad. Nels, what you think?

NELS

I don't know, Mama. Her stories seem all right to me, but I don't know.

MAMA

It would be good to know. Nels, this lady in the paper . . . what else does she say?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

NELS

*(Taking up the paper)*

Not much. The rest seems to be about *her* and her home.  
Let's see. . . .

*(He reads)*

"Apart from literature, Mrs. Moorhead's main interest in life is gastronomy."

MAMA

The stars?

NELS

No-eating. "A brilliant cook herself, she says that she would as soon turn out a good soufflé as a short story, or find a new recipe as she would a first edition."

MAMA

*(Reaching for the paper)*

I see her picture?

*(She looks at it)*

Is kind face.

*(Pause while she reads a moment. Then she looks up and asks)*

What is first edition?

*(Blackout)*

*(Lights up on L. turntable, representing the lobby of the Fairmont hotel. A couch against a column with a palm behind it. An orchestra plays softly in the background. MAMA is discovered seated on the couch, waiting patiently. She wears a hat and a suit, and clutches a newspaper and a bundle of manuscripts. A couple of guests come through the curtains and cross, disappearing into the wings L. MAMA watches them. Then FLORENCE DANA MOOR-*

I REMEMBER MAMA

HEAD enters through the curtains. She is a stout, dressy, good-natured, middle-aged woman. A BELL-BOY comes from the R., paging her)

BELL-BOY

Miss Moorhead?

F. D. MOORHEAD

Yes?

BELL-BOY

Telegram.

F. D. MOORHEAD

Oh. . . . Thank you.

(She tips him, and he goes. MAMA rises and moves towards her)

MAMA

Please . . . Please . . . Miss Moorhead . . . Miss Moorhead.

F. D. MOORHEAD

(Looking up from her telegram, on the steps)

Were you calling me?

MAMA

Yes. You are . . . Miss Florence Dana Moorhead?

F. D. MOORHEAD

Yes.

MAMA

Please . . . might I speak to you for a moment?

F. D. MOORHEAD

Yes—what's it about?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

I read in the paper what you say about writing.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(With a vague social smile)*

Oh, yes?

MAMA

My daughter, Katrin, wants to be writer.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(Who has heard that one before)*

Oh, really?

*(She glances at her watch on her bosom)*

MAMA

I bring her stories.

F. D. MOORHEAD

Look, I'm afraid I'm in rather a hurry. I'm leaving San Francisco this evening. . . .

MAMA

I wait two hours here for you to come in. Please, if I may talk to you for one, two minutes. That is all.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(Kindly)*

Of course, but I think I'd better tell you that if you want me to read your daughter's stories, it's no use. I'm very sorry, but I've had to make it a rule never to read anyone's unpublished material.

MAMA

*(Nods—then after a pause)*

It said in the paper you like to collect recipes . . . for eating.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

F. D. MOORHEAD

Yes, I do. I've written several books on cooking.

MAMA

I, too, am interested in gastronomy. I am good cook. Norwegian. I make good Norwegian dishes. Lutefisk. And Kjödboller. That is meat-balls with sauce.

F. D. MOORHEAD

Yes, I know, I've eaten them in Christiania.

MAMA

I have a special recipe for Kjödboller . . . my mother give me. She was best cook I ever knew. Never have I told this recipe, not even to my own sisters, because they are not good cooks.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(Amused)*

Oh?

MAMA

But . . . if you let me talk to you . . . I give it to you. I promise it is good recipe.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(Vastly tickled now)*

Well, that seems fair enough. Let's sit down.

*(They move to the couch and sit)*

Now, your daughter wants to write, you say? How old is she?

MAMA

She is eighteen. Just.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*Does she write, or does she just . . . want to write?*

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

Oh, she writes all the time. Maybe she should not be author, but it is hard to give up something that has meant so much.

F. D. MOORHEAD

I agree, but . . .

MAMA

I bring her stories. I bring twelve.

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(Aghast)*

Twelve!

MAMA

But if you could read maybe just one . . . To know if someone is good cook, you do not need to eat a whole dinner.

F. D. MOORHEAD

You're very persuasive. How is it your daughter did not come herself?

MAMA

She was too unhappy. And too scared . . . of you. Because you are celebrity. But I see your picture in the paper. . . .

F. D. MOORHEAD

That frightful picture!

MAMA

Is the picture of woman who like to eat good. . . .

F. D. MOORHEAD

*(With a rueful smile)*

It certainly is. Now, tell me about the Kjödboller.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

When you make the meat-balls you drop them in boiling stock. Not water. That is one of the secrets.

F. D. MOORHEAD

Ah!

MAMA

And the cream sauce. That is another secret. It is half *sour* cream, added at the last.

F. D. MOORHEAD

That sounds marvelous.

MAMA

You must grind the meat six times. I could write it out for you. And . . .

(*Tentatively*)

while I write, you could read?

F. D. MOORHEAD

(*With a laugh*)

All right. You win. Come upstairs to my apartment.

(*She rises*)

MAMA

Is kind of you.

(*They start out L.*)

Maybe if you would read *two* stories, I could write the recipe for Lutefisk as well. You know Lutefisk . . . ?

(*They have disappeared into the wings, and the turntable revolves out*)

(*Spot up, R. turntable. KATRIN at her desk*)

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

When Mama came back, I was sitting with my diary, which I called my Journal now, writing a Tragic Farewell to my Art. It was very seldom that Mama came to the attic, thinking that a writer needed privacy, and I was surprised to see her standing in the doorway.

(*She looks up. MAMA is standing on the steps, C.*)  
Mama!

MAMA

You are busy, Katrin?

KATRIN

(*Jumping up*)  
No, of course not. Come in.

MAMA

(*Coming down*)  
I like to talk to you.

KATRIN

Yes, of course.

MAMA

(*Seating herself at the desk*)  
You are writing?

KATRIN

No. I told you, that's all over.

MAMA

That is what I want to talk to you about.

KATRIN

It's all right, Mama. Really, it's all right. I was planning to tear up all my stories this afternoon, only I couldn't find half of them.

I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

They are here.

KATRIN

Did *you* take them? What for?

MAMA

Katrin, I have been to see Miss Moorhead.

KATRIN

Who's Miss . . . ? You don't mean Florence Dana Moorhead?

(MAMA nods)

You don't mean . . . Mama, you don't mean you took her my stories?

MAMA

She read five of them. I was two hours with her. We have glass of sherry. Two glass of sherry.

KATRIN

What . . . what did she say about them?

MAMA

(Quietly)

She say they are not good.

KATRIN

(Turning away)

Well, I knew that. It was hardly worth your going to all that trouble just to be told that.

MAMA

She say more. Will you listen, Katrin?

KATRIN

(*Trying to be gracious*)

Sure. Sure. I'll listen.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

MAMA

I will try and remember. She say you write now only because of what you have read in other books, and that no one can write good until they have felt what they write about. That for years she write bad stories about people in the olden times, until one day she remember something that happen in her own town . . . something that only she could know and understand . . . and she feels she must tell it . . . and that is how she write her first good story. She say you must write more of things you know. . . .

KATRIN

That's what my teacher always told me at school.

MAMA

Maybe your teacher was right. I do not know if I explain good what Miss Moorhead means, but whiie she talks I think I understand. Your story about the painter who is blind . . . that is because . . . forgive me if I speak plain, my Katrin, but it is important to you . . . because you are the dramatic one, as Papa has said . . . and you think it would feel good to be a painter and be blind and not complain. But never have you imagined how it would really be. Is true?

KATRIN

*(Subdued)*

Yes, I . . . I guess it's true.

MAMA

But she say you are to go on writing. That you have the gift.

*(KATRIN turns back to her, suddenly aglow)*

And that when you have written story that is real and

I REMEMBER MAMA

true . . . then you send it to someone whose name she give me.

*(She fumbles for a piece of paper)*

It is her . . . agent . . . and say she recommend you. Here. No, that is recipe she give me for goulash as her grandmother make it . . . here . . .

*(She hands over the paper)*

It helps, Katrin, what I have told you?

KATRIN

*(Subdued again)*

Yes, I . . . I guess it helps. Some. But what have I got to write about? I haven't seen anything, or been anywhere.

MAMA

Could you write about San Francisco, maybe? Is fine city. Miss Moorhead write about her home town.

KATRIN

Yes, I know. But you've got to have a central character or something. She writes about her grandfather . . . he was a wonderful old man.

MAMA

Could you maybe write about Papa?

KATRIN

Papa?

MAMA

Papa is fine man. Is wonderful man.

KATRIN

Yes, I know, but . . .

MAMA

*(Rising)*

I must go fix supper. Is late. Papa will be home.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

*(She goes up the steps to the curtains, and then turns back)*

I like you should write about Papa.

*(She goes inside)*

KATRIN

*(Going back to her seat behind the desk)*

Papa. Yes, but what's he ever done? What's ever happened to him? What's ever happened to *any* of us? Except always being poor and having illnesses, like the time when Dagmar went to hospital and Mama . . .

*(The idea hits her like a flash)*

Oh. . . . Oh. . . .

*(Pause—then she becomes the KATRIN of today)*

And that was how it was born . . . suddenly in a flash . . . the story of "Mama and the Hospital" . . . the first of all the stories. I wrote it . . . oh, quite soon after that. I didn't tell Mama or any of them. But I sent it to Miss Moorhead's agent. It was a long time before I heard anything . . . and then one evening the letter came.

*(She takes an envelope from the desk in front of her)*

For a moment I couldn't believe it. Then I went rushing into the kitchen, shouting. . . .

*(She rises from the desk, taking some papers with her, and rushes upstage, crying, "Mama, Mama." The curtains have parted on the kitchen—and the family tableau—MAMA, PAPA, CHRISTINE, and NELS. DAGMAR is not present. KATRIN comes rushing in, up the steps. The R. turntable revolves out as soon as she has left it)*

Mama . . . Mama . . . I've sold a story!

MAMA

A story?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

Yes, I've got a letter from the agent . . . with a check  
for . . .

(*Gasp*)  
five hundred dollars!

NELS

No kidding?

MAMA

Katrin . . . is true?

KATRIN

Here it is. Here's the letter. Maybe I haven't read it right.

(*She hands the letter. PAPA and MAMA huddle and gloat over it*)

CHRISTINE

What will you *do* with five hundred dollars?

KATRIN

I don't know. I'll buy Mama her warm coat, I know that.

CHRISTINE

Coats don't cost five hundred dollars.

KATRIN

I know. We'll put the rest in the Bank.

NELS

(*Kidding*)

Quick. Before they change their mind, and stop the  
check.

KATRIN

Will you, Mama? Will you take it to the Bank down-  
town tomorrow?

I REMEMBER MAMA

(MAMA looks vague)

What is it?

MAMA

I do not know how.

NELS

Just give it to the man and tell him to put it in your account, like you always do.

(MAMA looks up at PAPA)

PAPA

You tell them . . . now.

CHRISTINE

Tell us what?

MAMA

(Desperately)

Is no Bank Account! Never in my life have I been inside a bank.

CHRISTINE

But you always told us . . .

KATRIN

Mama, you've always said . . .

MAMA

I know. But was not true. I tell a lie.

KATRIN

But why, Mama? Why did you pretend?

MAMA

Is not good for little ones to be afraid . . . to not feel secure. But now . . . with five hundred dollar . . . I think I can tell.

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

(*Going to her, emotionally*)

Mama!

MAMA

(*Stopping her, quickly*)

You read us the story. You have it there?

KATRIN

Yes.

MAMA

Then read.

KATRIN

Now?

MAMA

Yes. No— Wait. Dagmar must hear.

(*She opens pantry door and calls*)

Dagmar.

DAGMAR

(*Off*)

Yes, Mama?

MAMA

(*Calling*)

Come here, I want you.

DAGMAR

(*Off*)

What is it?

MAMA

I want you. No, you leave the rabbits!

(*She comes back*)

What is it called . . . the story?

## I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

*(Seating herself in the chair that Mr. Hyde took in the opening scene)*

It's called "Mama and the Hospital."

PAPA

*(Delighted)*

You write about Mama?

KATRIN

Yes.

MAMA

But I thought . . . I thought you say . . . I tell you . . .

*(She gestures at PAPA, behind his back)*

KATRIN

I know, Mama, but . . . well, that's how it came out.

*(DAGMAR comes in)*

DAGMAR

What is it? What do you want?

MAMA

Katrin write story for magazine. They pay her five hundred dollar to print it.

DAGMAR

*(Completely uninterested)*

Oh.

*(She starts back for the pantry)*

MAMA

*(Stopping her)*

She read it to us. I want you should listen. You are ready, Katrin?

I REMEMBER MAMA

KATRIN

Sure.

MAMA

Then read.

*(The group around the table is now a duplicate of the grouping around MR. HYDE in the first scene, with KATRIN in his place)*

KATRIN

*(Reading)*

“For as long as I could remember, the house on Steiner Street had been home. All of us were born there. Nels, the oldest and the only boy . . .”

*(NELS looks up, astonished to be in a story)*

“my sister, Christine . . .”

*(CHRISTINE does likewise)*

“and the littlest sister, Dagmar. . . .”

DAGMAR

Am I in the story?

MAMA

Hush, Dagmar. We are all in the story.

KATRIN

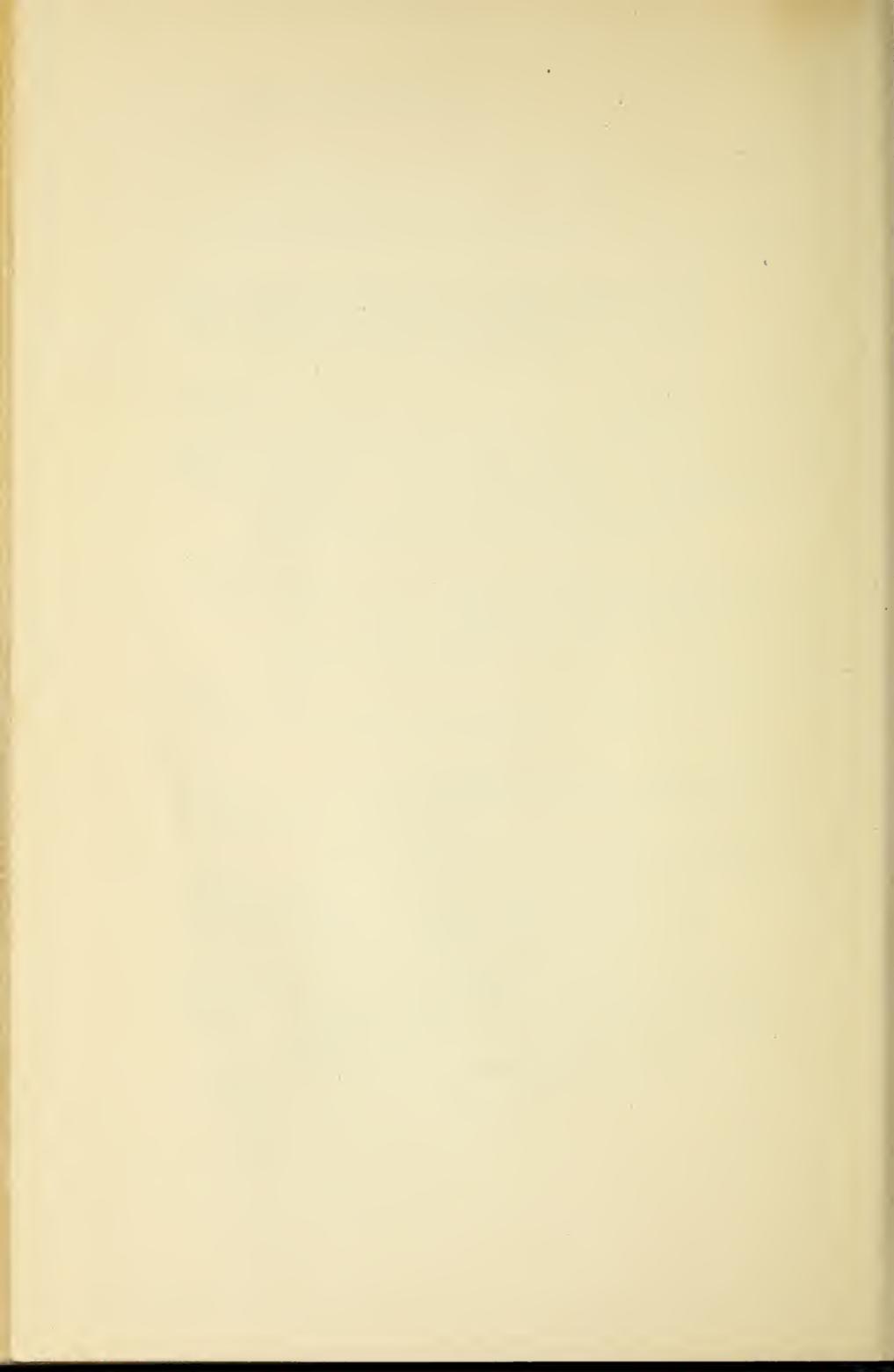
“But first and foremost, I remember Mama.”

*(The lights begin to dim and the curtain slowly to fall. As it descends, we hear her voice continuing)*

“I remember that every Saturday night Mama would sit down by the kitchen table and count out the money Papa had brought home in the little envelope. . . .”

*(By now, the curtain is down)*

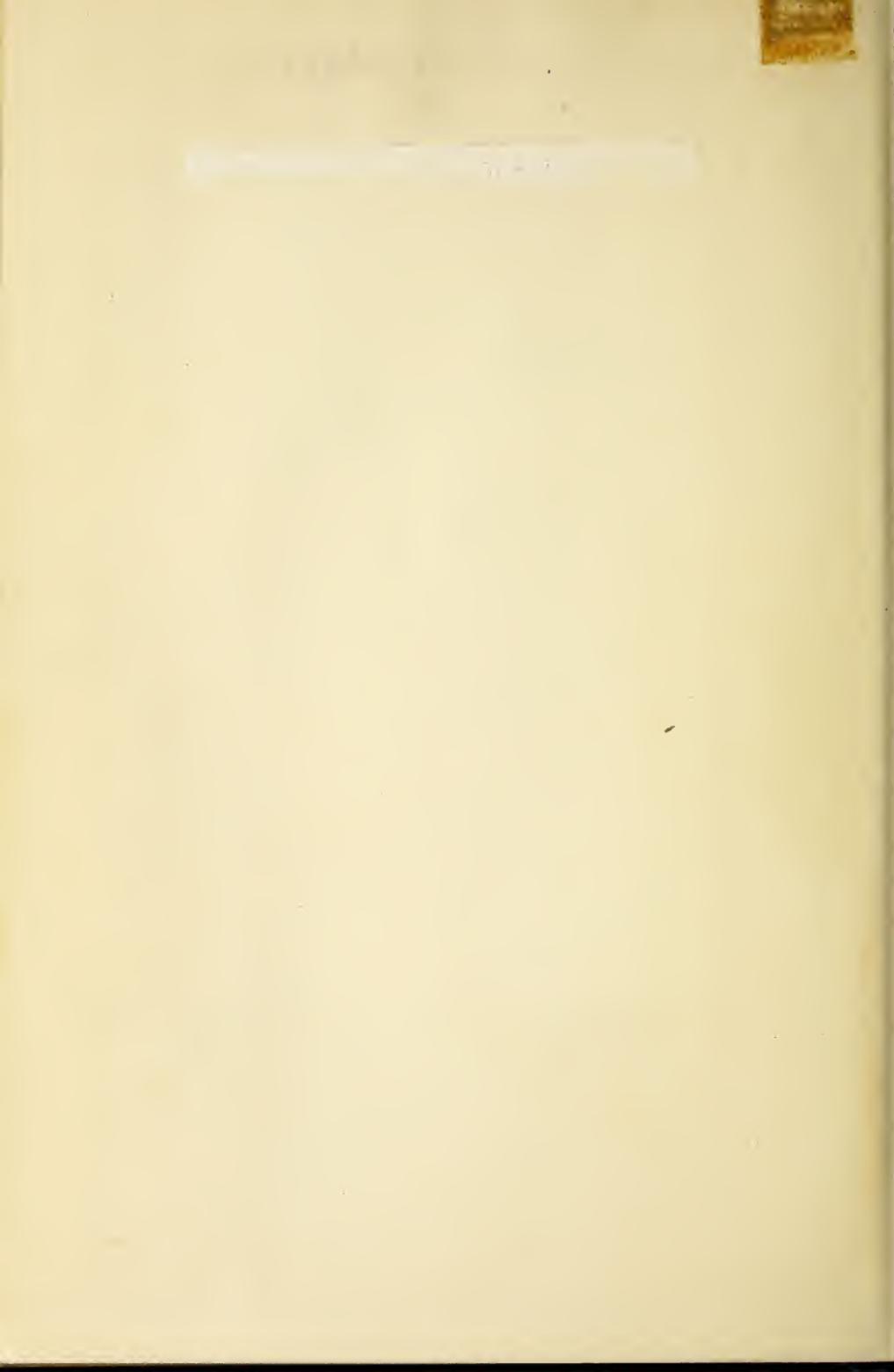
THE END







Char



822.91

V 246i

C - 3

C.2

I remember mama, main  
822.91V246i C.2



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A red circular stamp with a dotted border. Inside the border, the words "UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA" are written in a curved, dotted font. In the center, the word "LIBRARY" is printed in a bold, sans-serif font. There are small five-pointed stars at the bottom of the stamp.

